

# Millennial Surprise

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Think you know the Millennials? Think again.

**O**ur favorite program at the Memorytrends Conference & Expo 2007 involved a room full of shocked retailers, nine young consumers, and some nifty thinking-on-our-feet action. Not so easy for us to do when our mouths were hanging open because of something one of those nine young consumers just said.

Let us explain. We hosted "Meet the Millennials"- a live panel discussion where we gathered those nine young ladies, ages 20 - 24. We asked the questions and these articulate young women responded. And while we did not always like what they said, we were sure glad that they said it. Suffice to say, everyone learned a lot about how our group of Millennials chooses stores. Eight Millennial focus groups later, hearing some of the same things, we know they were speaking for their generation.

## Who They Are

A few years ago no one really paid too much attention to the Millennials - the 73 million Americans born between 1982 and 2000. But they are

now: by the year 2010 the Millennials will outnumber both Baby Boomers and Generation X. And if you think you know all there is to know about the Millennials you'd be wrong. They are too mercurial to pin down.

Millennials believe they can do it all and do it very well. They do not believe that just because they are young they are less capable of holding a job Boomers and Xers worked long and hard to get. Millennials are team players; they play to win and they are not afraid to let you know that. And they want what they want - right now.

We were all pretty complacent, thinking we could handle the Millennials when the time came, but we were wrong. Their elder statesmen are out of college now and they are wreaking havoc in the workplace. Our phones have been ringing off the hook the past few months as businesses of all kinds call to book our Millennial-Think programs.

See, the Millennials believe that the rest of us should change to accommodate them, not the other way around. And they are not budgeting. You want them to work on a weekend when they have other

plans? Good luck. Friends and family come first. Think a training session, classroom style, is a good idea? Not anymore. Video games and interactive Web sites are a huge part of a Millennial's world; they tend to learn better when things are interactive. Millennials prefer instant messaging and text-messaging over e-mail. But don't get excited about the prospect of advertising via text-messaging: texting is for friends and family only. And forget about voice-mail. That's way too old school for them.

## Panel Highlights

(Note: our panel consisted of college students, newlyweds, and moms. It's interesting to note that three were college educated, but have chosen to be stay-at-home moms. This might be a new trend to watch for.)

**Question:** What makes you choose one store over another that sells similar products?

"Price and location." This was an issue with our panel, but it makes sense: they were all either in school or raising children on a budget.

"Product selection." Panel members  
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mentioned H&M, a trend-setting, moderately priced apparel retailer with an ever-changing selection. Like any customer, they want a strong selection of basics as well as new items. Remember that Millennials have short attention spans – you will need to change models and classes more frequently to keep their interest. And just as important, change the feature areas on your sales floor at least once every two weeks.

**Q:** Tell us about what you like about your favorite retailers.

“The stores have a unique personality.”

“The stores are funky and fun. There’s always something going on.”

“The product is fresh and the store is easy to shop; aisles are clutter-free. I can easily move a stroller through the store.”

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“There are places to sit and chat.”

“The store workers are nice to me and welcome my children. They let me use the restroom and have a place for me to change my baby.”

“They offer clean shopping carts or strollers so I don’t have to haul in mine.”

“The people who work there know what they’re selling. They have lots of good ideas.”

“Coupons!” News flash: All Millennials love coupons. They will sign-up to receive your e-mail blasts

and/or newsletters if they include coupons. However, if your e-mail is too long or does not include photos, they hit the delete button right away.

“We like to shop to music, but don’t play boring music.” We got into

a discussion about this comment – what did she mean? Well, they all despise instrumental music; the direct quote was: “Play music with words!” which made us all laugh. Then the panel called out names of bands we might play in our stores; bands that most of the audience had never heard of. If the Foo Fighters, Fall Out Boy, and Green Day ring a bell, you’re ahead of the game. Bottom line, pick uplifting music with a good beat. Millennials like Disco too, and you know what we

always say: Disco is the sound of money.

**Q:** What drives you nuts about stores?

Each panel member had a variation of “I hate when I am ignored because of my age. Sales people always help older people before they help me.” This isn’t new either; we heard it years ago from Gen X shoppers and from Baby Boomers before them. The baton has officially changed hands.

**Q:** Why do you scrapbook?

“To remember special days with my family and friends.”

“My mom got me hooked.”

“I make small, personal gifts.”

“I like the social aspect, we scrapbook to hang out together.” Millennials are team players who tend to gather in groups. If they like your store, that’s good news for you.

“I am documenting my life.”

“I was strong-armed into scrapbooking by my co-workers. Now I like it!”

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“I was sick of photos in a box, I want to enjoy them.”

Q: What kinds of projects do you like?

Instant gratification was the theme. The panel agreed that they prefer quick, easy, and simple projects. They also like money-saving, unique kits with clear instructions. Consider this an opportunity to create your own kits using components and projects that are exclusive to your store.

- 33 percent of teens online share their own creations online, such as artwork, photos, stories, or videos.

- 32 percent say that they have created or worked on Web pages or blogs for others, including those for groups they belong to, friends or school assignments; 22 percent report keeping their own personal Web page.

- Internet users ages 12- to 28-years-old have embraced the online applications that enable communicative, creative, and social uses.

too old and too much of a perfectionist” and “Her projects cost too much.”

Millennials tend to watch DIY programs that help them with decorating. And because these shows highlight color and fashion trends, they use them as crafting and scrapbooking resources.

At the end of the program we asked each of them to tell us one thing that would make them choose one store over another. Here’s the condensed version of what they said:

- Do it better.
- Respect me. See me as a customer, not as an age.
- Offer carts and strollers.
- Be kid-friendly.
- Put in a play area.
- Offer more things digital.
- Offer incentives.
- Hold upbeat classes and not just baby, vacation, and holiday themes.

I won’t get bored and want to go somewhere else.

Our panel discussion was just a small example of how the Millennial generation will affect our businesses, but it was consistent with all of our other research. It’s safe to say that the Millennials are going to change the world, or at least life as we know it. This is a generation of beloved and cherished children who have never been told no; they are not used to, nor are they willing to change to accommodate your world. On the contrary, they prefer the rest of the world to change to accommodate them. And those accommodations need to start now. If you think the Baby Boomers were hard to please, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet! ■ \*KIZER & BENDER 2007. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

## “If you don’t have time to create a daily blog post, ask a Millennial store associate or customer to do it for you.”

Q: Are you a traditional scrapper? Have you tried digital scrapbooking?

The majority of our panelists were still traditional scrapbookers, however, several had tried digital scrapbooking and liked it. One panelist had made the switch to digital, and she isn’t going back. She creates 12”x12” pages, and then goes to Snapfish.com to order bound books.

Our panel members all felt there were a limited amount of digital layouts available to them; they commented that they did not want to do the same pages as their friends. This represents a change to introduce them to digital opportunities they may not be aware of. Make your store or Web site the “go to” place for new ideas and inspirations.

By now you should have an interactive Web site that is frequently updated. You need a blog as well. Consider this study from Pew Internet & American Life Project:

Eighteen- to 28 -year-olds are also significantly more likely than older users to send and receive instant messages, play online games, create blogs, download music, and search for school information.

Our panelists prefer Web sites that load quickly, are easy to navigate, have simple names, and offer plenty of free digital downloadable layouts and project ideas. If you don’t have time to create a daily blog post, ask a Millennial store associate or customer to do it for you. You can brainstorm the content together.

## There’s Always More To Ask

We asked which television shows and/or magazines influenced our panelists. They like *The View*, *The Rachael Ray Show* and the *Ellen DeGeneres Show*. Oprah and Martha, not so much. Their comments included, “Martha’s