Shopping Habits of the Millennial Generation

by Jared Grafman

The vast majority of music and news businesses failed to adapt with the Millennial generation. As a result, the two industries are still, today, rebuilding essentially from scratch. Why did those businesses fail? What makes Millennials so different from Generation X or Baby Boomers?

Not much beyond technology. The internet and mobile technology, shaped an even more efficient consumer base in digital natives. The digital tools make it simple for a person to find exactly what they want, nothing more, nothing less.

"When I go shopping, I have a specific reason for going in mind," 23-year-old Lisa Sauter, born in the heart of the Millennial generation, explained. "I need a new outfit for an occasion; I need some new items to replace existing ones; I need to get X, Y, and Z. Rarely do I go out shopping just to go shopping."

Millennials — Americans born between 1980 and 2000 — just have better resources to find particular songs at less cost than entire albums, locate specific news online instead of buying expensive subscriptions, and discover items on sale rather than regular price.

"I usually know what I'm looking for when I go in. These days I don't think I would ever need a salesman," 24-year-old Mike Evans observed of his shopping habits, "because all the questions I have I answer on my phone before I go in. Or if I see something there that raises more questions, I get on my phone and research it myself."

Digital technology and the internet aside, however, Millennials share similar customer expectations as those from Generation X and the Baby Boomers. Accenture published a study in June 2013 about generational shoppers. The researchers defined Millennials as born between 1980 and 2000, Generation X as those born from 1965 to 1979, and Baby Boomers as born from 1946 to 1964.

"Although Millennials have earned a reputation for viewing the world through a uniquely digital lens, our results found some remarkable similarities between them and their predecessors," the researchers concluded. For example, Accenture reported that more than 2 in 5 people from every generation had browsed merchandise at a store —and then shopped for those products online to find the best deal — more often than they did a year ago.

36 percent of respondents, in each surveyed generation, reported they would buy a product from a retailer's online store if they wanted to shop after-hours, according to Accenture. Nearly nine of ten consumers consider product availability when determining what stores they will shop at in their trips.

Nevertheless, being digitally native does not mean being digitally exclusive.

"In fact," Accenture reported, "interviews conducted recently at one of America's largest shopping malls confirmed our survey findings that many members of the digital generation actually prefer visiting stores to shopping online."

Businesses struggling to reach Millennials would be more successful if they considered the world wide web like a fax machine or telephone; it is just another way to communicate with people.

"These are young people for whom connective technology, the internet, the web, smartphones have pretty much always been around," [Forbes described in an April 2014 article](). "They use the internet, of course, almost endlessly, often from mobile devices. But it's not a thing to them, a discrete, nifty invention. Rather, for a millennial, it's just the norm. Like flush toilets. Like electricity."

The natural view of a blended digital and physical world has brought forward a new approach for serving customers, and one which has been naturally adopted by digital native consumers: An omni-channel experience.

"Simply put, it's the notion that consumers use more than one channel (web, catalog, mobile, store) to make a purchase," [Brian Kilcourse articulated in a 2011 Retail Systems Research article]().

Ultimately it's still the same economics principles at play, regardless whether the customer is 16 or 86 years old: Demand, and supply.

"The idea reflects the fact that consumers don't see channels," Kilcourse wrote, "they seek solutions: either a retailer satisfies a need or it doesn't."

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