The Millennials:

Observations from SuccessFunding's 2013 Internship Program

R. Cap Mertens

Overview

Who are the Millennials? They are 18 – 29 years old and are more ethnically and racially diverse than older adults. They're less religious (though not less spiritual), less likely to have served in the military, and are on track to become the most educated generation in American history.

To paraphrase Pew Research's report, they are history's first "always connected" generation. Steeped in digital technology and social media, they treat their multi-tasking hand-held gadgets like an extension of their body and Facebook like an extension of their brain – for better and worse. They embrace multiple modes of self-expression. (Pew Research Center).

This article outlines 10 observations from PCI's 2013 internship program.

Quick Facts:

➢ 39% of Millennials have a tattoo (Pew Study 2010)

➢ One in five have posted a video of themselves online

➢ Three quarters have created a profile on a social networking site

Observation 1: The communication channel you use carries significance.

Millennials place importance on the channel others pick when communicating with them. It was not uncommon for them to differentiate between receiving an email from someone versus a text, versus a phone call. This group feels confident giving out cell phone numbers and email addresses. But texting is rarely done unless there's a degree of familiarity and it is typically reserved for those in a trusted network of acquaintances. Texting is not used just because of its brevity, many times it is chosen to convey a connectedness, an acknowledgement that one is now trusted, esteemed.

When I first started receiving text messages from our interns rather than an email or phone call, I initially regarded it as a lack of respect and thought it was unprofessional. It was only later that I realized they had switched to texting me updates because of the level of comfort they had with me. To them, email is what you use for official communications. Email is to Millennials what interoffice memos were to Gen-Xers – a formal, official, and perhaps obsolete communications channel.

When a response was needed on short notice with a team member, they texted or sent a message via Facebook. Emails and phone calls were rarely used when a response was needed quickly.

Quick Facts:

➢ The median number of text messages sent by Millennials is 50 per day. (Pew Research Center)

➢ 88% of Millennials use their cell phones to text, versus 51% of Boomers. (Pew Research Center)

Observation 2: Change comes through collaboration and consensus.

With so many team based projects during their school years, it is no surprise that Millennials expect a similar structure in the workplace. This bodes well for companies since high collaboration is indicative of close team work and strong company cultures thrive when teams, not individuals, are put first. But just because they believe in a high level of collaboration does not mean they spend lots of time in meetings. I rarely observed them call for a meeting since they instead relied heavily on impromptu huddles on a frequent basis. This is a large part of why Dispatch worked so well for us. This tool kept everyone informed about the project and allowed anyone the ability to add comments. Then, when it was time for final review, the collaborative approach was employed again in getting the necessary sign-off.

Our interns liked being together so much, their favorite workspace was not assigned cubicles, but rather being together in "the intern lounge," an unused office they repurposed for their collaborative sessions. Case in point, four of them were happiest when they were in that small space, rather than being in individual cubicles, giving up privacy and personal physical space for collaboration.

➢ 29% of Millennial workers think work meetings to decide on a course of action are very efficient. Compared to 45% of Boomers (Iconoculture 2011)

➢ Millennials will be leading our organizations and will outnumber the baby boomers in the workforce by 2015.

Observation 3: Multi-tasking is out. Task switching is in.

Give Millennials 3 or 4 or 10 projects in a day and let them make the decision which one they want to work on in any given moment. Having only one task is sheer boredom and frustration. Digital interruptions are the norm in their life and to keep concentration means to continuously break concentration into smaller time blocks. To keep projects running smoothly and have a bias toward action (difficult in a collaborative environment), I found it important to institute frequent status check-ins and put a deadline on every assignment up-front.

According to Caroline Winnett in the article, "The Prefrontal Cortex Is The Way To Millennials," she states that, "Millennials are also uniquely adept at multi-tasking. Gen Y has grown up in a world where they're constantly using at least one device, and because of this, their brains have adapted to a rapid task-switching environment. When it comes to getting your brand's message out, be sure to leverage all those channels. You should be easily accessible on the web, on a smartphone, and on a tablet. Your brand needs to fit seamlessly into their rapid-switching environment."

The opportunity to gain professional development is perceived as a huge win with this group. Great importance is placed on being able to add another bullet point to their LinkedIn resume. Give

Millennials a task that they do not know, and their initial reaction is almost always enthusiasm, not terror. They might not be able to complete the task, but they will ferret out who in the organization does have the expertise – a legacy of a lifetime on the Internet, where even the President might do a Reddit AMA and, as the old New Yorker cartoon has it, nobody knows you're a dog.

Be forewarned, however: the signs of a Millennial who is drowning are different than Gen-Xers or Boomers. Learn how to read the signs properly and do not confuse their display of confidence and optimism as a guarantee that they will get the job done properly or on time.

Observation 4: There is no corporate ladder. There are just interesting characters along the path to success.

Likewise, Millennials have a different take on a company's org chart. They are not loyal to a "boss" figure and they are not intimidated by rank or title. They will learn the corporate hierarchy but do not depend on it. Instead, they are very good at understanding the nuances of those who are in management versus those who are in leadership. They believe that in any given situation, it is the one who presents the most cohesive, logical plan and has a clear vision who gets the final say for a specific decision. The implication to people in management is clear: be a leader or a coach or a mentor, but never come across as an authoritative, dictatorial boss. And, don't be threatened when your decisions are challenged. It's not insubordination, it's a just a lack of intimidation.

Quick Fact:

➢ On average, a 26-year-old has had seven jobs in his or her career. (Intrepid Study 2010)

Observation 5: Wanted: a company with which there can be a lasting and emotional connection. Openness and transparency is a must, willing to give heart and soul (for a time) in exchange.

This group expects companies to be their "friend." They bond with their favorite brands and are unabashed in their compliments for companies they like. One of our interns has Pepsi as a Twitter follower (a relatively common practice by companies in order to more easily communicate with potential customers). Her loyalty to them for following her is so great that she will not drink any other soft drink and compliments them frequently in her tweets. Who companies choose to follow is just as important to this group, as which companies they (the Millennials) chose to follow. This group expects transparency and enjoys the influence they can wield over a company by promoting or denigrating them. Thanks to social media's reach, they have a platform and are not shy about using it. My recommendation to companies is to find the Twitter influencers and follow them. They have become the tail that wags the dog.

The Millennials have a love affair with brands. From "liking" and actively promoting, to buying branded merchandise, this is a group not shy about being walking, talking company advertisements. Because they rely significantly on word-of-mouth endorsements, the challenge for emerging companies is to find early adaptors who are also social media influencers.

Quick Facts:

- 40% of Millennials think that blogging about workplace issues is acceptable. (By the Numbers - 50 Facts about Millennials)

- Most Millennials engage with brands across multiple channels. 95% of teens "fan" companies on Facebook and also subscribe to their emails. Only 2% interact with brands on social networks alone.

Observation 6: The job will get done, but it will be the place and time of my choosing.

It was not uncommon for an intern to give me less than a day's notice when they could not be in the office the next day. Whether it was because of a last minute trip to Hong Kong, vacation time with a parent who was suddenly back in the country, or other last minute events, their schedules tended to be very fluid. Such spontaneity given their age is expected. But what was different and gratifying as an employer was how willing they were to make sure their project timelines were not adversely affected. They had no hesitation in working while away from the office and felt tremendous freedom in being able to structure the when and where of their work. They have seen what technology does in blurring the lines between one's personal life and professional life and they are determined to take better control of it than their parents ever managed to do. In the UNC Kenan-Flager School of Business article, "Maximizing Millennials in the Workplace," the authors write:

"While Baby Boomers and Gen Xers want job security and structure, Millennials seek employability and flexibility. Millennials want to continually add to their skills in meaningful ways. For them, work isn't just about income. It's about personal enrichment and fulfillment, which means that having flexibility in their work schedules is highly regarded. In fact, a recent Mercer study (in Nekuda, 2011) found that the top three career priorities for Millennials were compensation (most Millennials graduate from college with an average of $20,000 in debt), flexible work schedules, and the opportunity to make a difference. Not far behind the top three were having trust in their organization's leadership, receiving benefits and getting professional development opportunities." (UNC Kenan Flagler Business School)

I predict that the field of Human Resources will define radically different vacation and sick day policies to accommodate the ever blurred lines between work time and personal time. Technology will be forced to evolve so that managers can more accurately measure actual productivity and results. Timeclocks, while useful instruments in telling us face time on the job, are not sophisticated enough to give insight into whether the time "on the job" was spent on areas that are advancing the company.

Observation 7: Social media is judge, jury and executioner.

When a wrong is done to them, social media is the weapon of choice. They have very high trust in social media. When one of our interns had a previous job with an employer who was not going to give proper credit to her for her work, she took the matter up with her professors and threatened to "out" the employer on her social media channels. The employer quickly backed down and gave her the proper credit. They have witnessed the power social media can give them and feel very confident in

employing such an ally, if needed. As a result, social media has become a double-edged sword for companies: necessary to maintain even the rudiments of their brands, but an even more potent tool for aggrieved customers, employees and even otherwise disinterested bystanders.

A recent example occurred when a Wall Street consulting firm placed a $750 sandwich order from a New York food truck and then failed to leave a tip. The Millennial food truck employee called the company out on Twitter, which evidently caught the eye of the company's home office in San Francisco. The consulting company then called the food truck chain to complain; the company fired the employee; and the employee wrote about the experience in the online magazine *The Awl* (for which he was an intern). A few million page views later, any search for either Glass Lewis or the Milk Truck on Twitter resulted in an avalanche of bad viral publicity for the two companies (made worse by the fact that both companies' final tweets for several days were to each other, the Milk Truck acknowledging the firing of the employee and Glass Lewis thanking them for it – their radio silence only allowed an angry virtual mob to fill the empty space).

Millennials determine a company's legitimacy and reputation in part by using Facebook. Several of them mentioned that Facebook is the first place they go to when researching a company and if there is no presence on Facebook by that company, it is regarded as suspect. This makes sense when you think about how well versed this generation is in being careful about clicking on links and visiting potentially harmful websites. Facebook is deemed safe. Facebook allows companies a medium to show a "happier, hipper and more helpful" face, the very persona to which this generation is attracted. They are also very careful to place privacy boundaries on their social media profiles and have a far better understanding in general on what to not share online than older groups.

Observation 8: Favorite office equipment: smartphone. Second best: laptop. Dead last: a desktop computer.

It's all about being mobile. They'll work in the office, out of the office - just don't confine them to one spot. While working this past year with a 60-person start-up in Guadalajara, I was fascinated to watch the traffic patterns in the office. There was not a single desktop computer in the building. The average age of their employees is 24 and they were constantly on the move, circulating from one work area to another. Because of laptops, tablets, smartphone and wireless technology, there really is little reason to sit in one place for a long period. The interactions and active seeking out of help was far more extensive than if they had to "bother" someone to come over to their desktop.

Quick facts:

➢ 41% of Millennials have made a purchase using their smartphone (By the Numbers - 50 Facts about Millennials)

➢ More than 39 million tablets shipped worldwide during the first calendar quarter of 2013

➢ Global personal computer (PC) sales have fallen for the fifth quarter in a row, making it the 'longest duration of decline' in history. Worldwide PC shipments totaled 76 million units in the second quarter, a 10.9% drop from a year earlier. (Gartner, 2013)

Observation 9: Real life conversation is just like instant messaging: it waxes and wanes, but never has a hard and fast end.

When you think about an online chat session, there is no formal beginning or end. Sure, at the start of the day, you might say hello, but you really don't "end" the conversation. You just resume. In face-to-face conversations, this group had difficulty reading the cues to know when the conversation had reached a logical conclusion. The difficult part was determining how to end impromptu conversations. Generally, it was just best to return to one's work, even if it meant having the awkwardness of a few unfinished thoughts dangling in mid-air. A suggestion is to have visual cues that can be displayed at someone's desk to show when one is available for collaboration or when one is focused and does not wish to be interrupted. Such a visual cue mimics the "online" and "do not disturb" statuses found in IM apps.

The importance of instant messaging's effects on how this group interacts socially should be carefully examined. One interesting trend worth keeping an eye on is online stickers, which are larger-scale emoticons that are primarily used for instant messaging (IM) chats. They are popular among some because they help convey emotion, and are more visual than blocks of text.

Japan-based mobile messaging company Line revealed that it made $17 million from selling stickers during the first quarter of 2013. In the US, when Path first released their stickers, they told TechCrunch that it made more money during the 24 hours after it launched stickers than it had done during any day previously. I believe that this trend suggests certain products will have two components to a purchase: the virtual product that is immediate and displayable to a wide audience and then its accompanying, physical product.

Quick Fact:

➢ Eighty-five percent of Millennials said that user-generated content had some influence on what they purchased, especially larger purchases. (Caroline Winnett)

Observation 10: Work has to mean more than profit.

Smart companies recognize that they need to give their employees a sense of purpose, of being more than profitable. At no other point and with no other generation has this been more important than with our Millennials. Companies must prove they exist to do good. This generation is very socially conscious and expects the same of their employer.

The 2013 Millennial Impact Report reveals that "Millennials aren't interested in structures, institutions, and organizations, but rather in the people they help and the issues they support. The key for nonprofits, therefore, is to build a comprehensive Millennial engagement platform that invites them to participate in the cause and maximize their involvement. Millennials first support causes they are passionate about (rather than institutions), so it's up to organizations to inspire them and show them that their support can make a tangible difference on the wider issue."

Quick Facts:

➢ 65% of Millennials receive email or newsletters from one to five nonprofits

> ➤ More than 60% liked it most when institutions shared stories about successful projects or the people they helped

Summary

As a Gen-Xer, I feel fortunate to have had a glimpse into corporate America pre- and post-internet integration. When I began my career as a technical writer at Diebold, the Web was a curiosity that at the time had an uncertain relationship with the corporate world. I became the company's second web developer; the first, my mentor, was a scientist who had been exposed to the Web while working at NASA. Compared to today, when social media sites have multi-billion-dollar market caps or are traded between tech conglomerates for incredible sums of money, the Web of the early 1990s was a small and curious thing.

As the Web became part of the mainstream, I went with it, developing products that ranged from creating sports-related media sites (Jamie Newberg's Texas Rangers minor league news site), to consulting with Ducati for their website, to developing tools for international business (such as an auction system for international energy rights that handled the first million-dollar-plus energy sector sale on the Web). I managed developers and designers, onshore and offshore, watched mobile phones go from tiny monochrome screens to giant Retina displays, and saw an entire generation grow up taking for granted an industry that I was part of, in a tiny way, take from an academic curiosity to an economic powerhouse.

The next generation of associates is nothing like what has come before.

For those of us who lived through that transformation, we hold a continued and pronounced distinction between the physical and the virtual worlds – lives lived "online" (often at work) and "offline" (everywhere else). In the 1990s, even though email had become ubiquitous in the office, it was nearly impossible to get elsewhere. (Craig, my husband, remembers owning a portable e-mail system with an "acoustic coupler" – a 1970s-era modem that had to be held up to the handset of a payphone to retrieve email. More than once he would spend hours at payphones while on vacation, waiting four or five minutes to download a few emails, typing out replies on a tiny keyboard, and then spending another five sending his replies back.)

This distinction between these two spaces does not appear to be nearly as evident with Millennials as Boomers – iPhones, tablet computing, perhaps even Google Glass are blurring the idea of "online" and "offline." Just as our media consumption moved from the morning newspaper and the six o'clock news to websites, smartphone apps, and Twitter; and as our work moved out of the office and into our homes and holidays; so too are we seeing such sacrosanct temples as higher education trying to figure out, with fitful but steady progress, what it means to take education online. In the end, the challenge of creating an "always-on" generation is not fundamental, but merely one of engineering – and engineers will *always* find a way.

With my younger cohorts, I witnessed very different work habits from older colleagues. They place great importance in variety, flexibility and sociability in the workplace. Having the right work structure that emphasizes discipline, focus and persistence will ensure companies can help this diverse, well-educated and passionate talent pool reach their full potential.

Here are some final recommendations for consideration:

1. If you haven't already, institute a formal internship program. Organizations have a distinct advantage when there is a mix of age ranges. I witnessed a morale boost this year by having our tenured associates work closely with our interns.
2. Learn to master different communication channels – get outside your traditional modes. If you don't currently text or IM, try it. You may find it adds a richer dimension to your communications.
3. Have a strong project tracking system in place so that you can dole out multiple assignments and still have solid accountability.
4. Be clear about the chain of command in your organization and keep reinforcing a culture of servant leadership. It levels the playing field for everyone and emphasizes the need for all to develop his or her talents to the fullest.
5. A good corporate social media strategy must be authentic, caring and on point. Take all feedback seriously and keep your management team on the front line of client contact. No one in leadership can afford to be too far removed from what the clients are saying. If Steve Jobs could personally respond to emails from customers, employees, and third-party developers, so can you.
6. Be insatiably curious and never stop learning!

Supporting documents

➢ http://cdn.trustedpartner.com/docs/library/AchieveMCON2013/Research%20Report/Millennial%20Impact%20Research-EMBARGO.pdf

➢ http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf

➢ http://www.aweber.com/blog/email-marketing/marketing-to-the-millennial-generation.htm

➢ http://thenextweb.com/asia/2013/07/12/stickers/

Contact

beckicap@gmail.com