

Selling to millennials

A different approach

Millennials - those who reached young adulthood around the year 2000 - can be a brand's best friend, or its worst enemy.



Who are Millennials?

They're the generation for whom advertising pervades all aspects of everyday life. While their elders may have been exposed to a few hundred advertisements a day, for millennials that figure has multiplied many times over as they use social media to communicate, interact and source information through their smart phones, tablets - now even their watches.

So doesn't that make this a generation that's easy to sell to?

The answer is a definite 'No'. While it would be wrong to over-generalise, what salespeople and marketers need to understand is that the way many millennials shop and buy is very different to previous generations and, while they're often characterised disparagingly as having an attitude of 'entitlement', that simply means that they expect much more from product and service providers. Millennials won't take at face value a company's claims about its own products and services – because they don't have to. Quite literally, at their fingertips they can find all there is to know about what's on offer, the alternatives and experiences of others – not just in their own locality but often in worldwide communities of fellow consumers. Yes, we may all use comparison websites, but for most of us that means we're still at the mercy of the sellers' PR machinery. For web-savvy millennials, researching online comes as second nature: and they are far more adept at controlling and evaluating the information they find.

It goes deeper

Millennials understand not only the power of brands, but the power that they themselves have to create – or destroy – brand value. For a brand to earn a millennial's loyalty it needs to provide a combination of



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product quality, great customer experience and, increasingly, an ethical dimension in terms of social responsibility and sustainability in its production cycle. If a company is found to be presenting a falsely concerned face to the market – so-called 'greenwashing' – it can take just a single 'tweet' from a millennial for that to be exposed to tens of thousands of twitter users – maybe even more. And there are plenty of examples of companies that have had to radically change the way they operate – for the better – as a result.

The conclusion?

The traditional hard sell maxim – 'ABC: Always Be Closing' – won't wash with millennials. They expect a brand to live up to its promise – not 'Always Be Closing' but 'Always be Helping'. If it does, they'll be the most loyal of customers – and, just as importantly, they'll let their online communities know about it too.

Once a company understands how millennials think, act and communicate, they can become its most influential promotional channel and a truly valuable asset.

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