

Millennial Behaviors and Higher Education Focus Group Results

How are Millennials different from previous generations *at the same age*?

Millennials: Born 1979 to 1994; largest generation since Baby Boomers; most racially and ethnically diverse US generation ever; 40+% are children of divorce.

Different Personalities: Millennial students from one medical school showed significant differences when compared with Generation X students on 10 of 16 factors on a standard personality test (16PF). Millennials are more *warm and outgoing*, (Warmth) more *abstract than concrete* (Reasoning), more *adaptive and mature* (Emotional Stability), more *dutiful* (Rule Consciousness), more *socially bold and adventuresome* (Social Boldness), more *sensitive and sentimental* (Sensitivity), more *self-doubting and worried* (Apprehension), more *open to change and experimenting* (Openness to Change), and more *organized and self disciplined* (Perfectionism) but less *solitary and individualistic* (Self Reliance)¹

More Consumer Choices; Selectivity: Perhaps the most important Millennial behavior is their expectation for more selectivity and options. They have grown up with a huge array of choices and they believe that it is their birthright. They feel less need to conform in their consumer choices to everyone else in their generation or other generations. The converse is also true: they are most unhappy with limited choices (e.g. when there is only one professor teaching a particular required course). Millennials are likely to switch from one brand to another (price and quality being equal) if the second brand is associated with a good cause. Millennials are the leading consumer edge and the natives of “The Long Tail” phenomena.² They are more resistant to conventional marketing and advertisements and are more influenced by their social network, i.e. viral marketing.

Personalization and Customization: Once Millennials do make their choices in products and services, they expect many personalization and customization features that meet their changing needs, interests and tastes.

Impatient: Millennials, by their own admission, have no tolerance for delays. They expect their services instantly when they are ready. They require almost constant feedback to know how they are progressing. Their worst nightmare is when they are delayed, required to wait in line, or have to deal with some other unproductive process. Their desire for speed and efficiency can not be overestimated. The need for speedy satisfaction, or as some believe, instant gratification, permeates virtually all of their service expectations.

Experiential Learners: Millennials strongly prefer learning by doing. They almost never read the directions; love to learn by interacting. Multiplayer gaming, computer simulations, and social networks are some of their favorite environments and provide little penalty for their trial and error learning. By and large, Millennials have said that they find their average lectures boring. With such experiential learning, the Millennial gets much more interactivity and feedback about what works and what does not.

Digital Natives: They clearly adapt faster to computer and internet services because they have always had them. While they still want and expect expert teachers in a face-to-face environment, they expect the speed, convenience, flexibility and power provided by digital services and resources. Give us services digitally, they tell us, and let us decide how much we will use the face-to-face versus the online. Almost all Millennials are on Facebook; few are on Second Life.

¹ Nichole J Borges et al. “Comparing Millennial and Generation X Medical Students at One Medical School. *Academic Medicine*; 81.6 (2006): 571-576

² Chris Anderson. *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More* Hyperion: New York 2006.

Practical; Results & Achievement Oriented: Millennials are interested in processes and services that really work and really speed their interactions. They prefer merit systems to others (e.g. seniority).

Gamers: Millennials have spent thousands of hours playing electronic, computer and video games. They love the constant interactivity, full motion multimedia, colorful graphics, the ability to learn and progress to higher levels, and the ability to collaborate with friends in their learning and competitions. Gaming offers thrills, competition, engagement and a rich array of emotional stimuli that also enhance their learning.

Nomadic Communication Style: Millennials have more friends and communicate with them more frequently using IM (instant messaging), text messaging, cell phones as well as more traditional communication channels. They are prolific communicators: Millennials, 18-24, make almost 19% more voice calls and 300% more text messages than 35-44 year olds; 82% more voice calls and 617% more text messages than 45-54 year olds. They love and expect communication mobility; to remain in constant touch wherever and whenever, un-tethered.

Media/ Format Agnostic: They most enjoy interactive full motion, multimedia, graphical presentations, and audio although they will use any media.

Intelligence: They respect intelligence and education; “it is cool to be smart”. They elect to go onto graduate work more often and may turn out to be the first generation in history that the majority have college degrees.

As Employees: They expect to spend no more than 18 months to 2 years in their first job; expect constant practical training and useful skills; want office hours with flexible schedules; are more likely to be recruited online. 61% of CEOs say they have difficulty attracting and integrating younger workers.

Balanced Lives: They don’t want to work 80 hours a week and sacrifice their health and their leisure time, even for considerably higher salaries. Yet they typically expect incomes exceeding their parents.

Collaboration: After many years of collaborating at schools, day care, soccer teams, orchestras, peer-to-peer networks, games, and other structured activities, Millennials know how and when to work with other people more effectively. Even those who do not prefer collaboration typically do so, if they think it gives them a practical advantage.

Flexibility / Convenience: Millennials prefer to keep their time and commitments flexible longer in order to take advantage of better options; they also expect employers, other people, and institutions to give them more flexibility. They want to “time and place shift” their services, where and when they are ready. They want more granularity in the services so they can be interrupted and finish when they are ready without loss of productivity.

Multitaskers: Millennials, as a group, excel at juggling several tasks at once and see this as an efficient, practical use of their time. They are, as already noted, very impatient. Multitasking can enable them to accelerate their learning by permitting them to accomplish more than one task at the same time, but they are not always good at knowing when this is effective or not. They use trial and error learning here as well. They do want to use their time most efficiently and multitasking offers them more options.

Less Reading: Millennials, disturbingly, are not reading as much as previous generations, esp. newspapers.

Political & Involvement: They are more likely to consider themselves as independents and liberal (30%) than Gen X; more 18-29 yr. olds voted in 2008 vs. 2004 (18% vs. 17% of electorate); 65% for Obama (2008) compared to 54% for Kerry (2004) and 48% (2000) for Gore.

Caveat: Generational research is a matter of degree. Clearly not everyone in a generational cohort behaves the same. Focus groups are not statistically valid but can be used to test formal research studies. They are useful to learn more information about specific behaviors and about local population differences.

Other Behaviors: Direct; Confident; Inclusive; Tolerant; Greener; Volunteerism.

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