

Try to Walk in Millennials' Shoes (Before You Market to Them)

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Marketing to millennials is all the rage. Still, for many, crafting an effective message for millennials remains a mystery. We may know a few things about how old they are and what they like, but do those observations translate into strategies we can use to win their business? Not always.

Let's unpack some principles we can leverage to appeal to 20- and 30-somethings in a way that resonates. Specifically, we'll explore millennial marketing from an insurance industry perspective.

1. Don't just drive revenue; drive influence.

According to Michael Parrish DuDell, a featured speaker at the [Property Innovation Summit](#) earlier this year, when it comes to millennials, "mind share" is more important than market share.

In other words, your continued success has less to do with the size and growth of your business at present than it does with "how influential your brand is in the minds and in the hearts of your consumers," said DuDell. "Because that is where that loyalty comes from."

This isn't to say you shouldn't be thinking about revenue. Rather, don't allow your focus on market share to eclipse the need to become a visible personality in your audience's world.

To put it another way, market share is where you are right now. Mind share is the future. It's the interest and loyalty that's going to carry you to where you want to be. What story are you telling? In what ways are you making your brand visible in society, not just in your marketing campaigns?

"You have to really think about your business on the market share, the mind share piece and figure out what the right calibration is," DuDell said. "For me, personally, in my business it's 60/40."

2. Weave a seamless experience from online to offline.

The digital experience has been a topic on everyone's mind for years now. But according to [an Accenture study](#), "68 percent of all millennials demand an integrated, seamless experience regardless of the channel. That means being able to transition effortlessly from smartphone to personal computer to physical store in their quest for the best products and services."

Your millennial customers want to shop for insurance on their mobile devices, then visit your website on their lunch breaks to research a few questions, then notice your office on their drive home, walk through the door and—here's the important part—feel a continuity between all of these channels. Visually and emotionally, they want to feel that all touchpoints function in harmony. They want to segue from one channel to another without starting over.

3. Be yourself...really.

We have this notion about what's interesting and popular, and we'd all like our businesses to fit this notion. In reality, however, some industries are just not a good fit for every version of cool.

For example, over the last few decades, healthy food [became a major trend](#) in the fast food industry. While some chains struggled to reinvent themselves as healthy, Taco Bell chose not to jump on that bandwagon. Instead, it embraced its reputation for deliciously not-good-for-you food and in 2009 began developing Doritos Locos Tacos—[one of its best-selling products ever](#). Some restaurants lend themselves to healthy food; others don't. Some industries are naturally sleek; others are more utilitarian. Insurance falls in the second category. To the outside world, our work isn't always exciting, but it's important. To market ourselves in a compelling way, we have to embrace that and find ways to leverage it.

Whatever else, we have to avoid marketing ourselves in a way that we think millennials will find appealing if it's not actually true to who and what we are. Millennials, more than any other audience, will be repulsed, because they'll feel we're being dishonest—and they won't be wrong.

4. Find ways to leverage nostalgia.

For older millennials especially—those in their late-20s to mid-30s—the 1990s were a time of prosperity and optimism. As a result, DuDell observed, it's a compelling era to incorporate in your marketing. "We look at our youth, and we are very sentimental about it, frankly," he said.

As a result, if you can resurrect a lost gem from pop culture that's a decade or two old, and build that idea into a marketing campaign today, it may instantly resonate with your millennial audience.

Parting thoughts

As you market to millennials, try to walk in their shoes. Remember the age in which they grew up. DuDell points out the perfect storm that formed the millennial mindset between the years of '89 and '99. That storm included rapid growth adoption of technology; a flourishing and hyper-inflated economy; and the proliferation of helicopter parents.

In his words, “When you start to think about our need, our desire, our want for immediate interaction, immediate gratification, it comes down to this idea that we were raised on it. We were raised on the notion that we can have what we want when want it, especially as it relates to information.”

Although millennials are more connected than ever before, they may be lonelier than ever before too, with screen time replacing people time. They're also coming of age and managing shifting expectations—how things should ideally be and how they really are.

As with all with all types of marketing, better understanding leads to greater success. Keep the big picture in mind, and the pieces will follow.

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