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B2B: A MANUFACTURER'S GUIDE

MARKETING
TO
MILLENNIALS



550 North Reo Street, Suite 300
Tampa, Florida 33609
1-866-925-9524
www.LocalDirective.com
Email: [Get Started@LocalDirective.com](mailto:GetStarted@LocalDirective.com)

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Introduction

The generation born in the years between 1980 – 2000 is known as Generation Y, or, more commonly, the Millennial generation. Millennials make up 25% of the US population and within the next 10 years they will make up approximately 75% of the workforce.

Clearly, Millennials are a segment of the US population that manufacturers can't afford to ignore. In fact, according to [a recent report from Google and Millward Brown Digital](#), 46% of potential B2B buyers are Millennials. This number has been increasing since 2012 and will continue to rise. The challenge is that marketing to this generation of buyers is starkly different than marketing to Baby Boomers or even Generation X segments.

One of the most important characteristics of Millennials is that this generation has had access to the internet since their childhood. Technology has always been an inherent part of their lives. Innovation in technology has gained phenomenal momentum during the early years of the Millennial generation. This, in turn, has shaped the way Millennials interact with businesses and what they expect from technology advancements. According to the Google and Millward Brown Digital report, 70% of all B2B buyers are doing their research online before making the actual purchase. That means if you're not providing information online that they can use in their research, chances are you will be overlooked.

A few key notes to keep in mind when working to attract a Millennial buyer to your manufacturing company is that you should keep your message light; in other words, don't be boring. Use social media and engage in fun marketing tactics. Given the fast-paced, always-on world Millennials grew up in, many lose interest quickly, so be appealing. Be personable and show them how you and your product can help them look good to their boss and to their customers. Show them how you can help make their job easier and more efficient. Have meaning and purpose in your communication. Perhaps most importantly, since many of these folks are early in their careers, position yourself as a resource to help them learn. If you can create a strategy that allows them to collaborate with you, such as by actively soliciting their feedback, you will make great strides in engaging their interest in your company and your product offerings.

A Generational Shift in B2B Interaction

The growing number of Millennials taking leadership and management roles in companies across the globe signals a very important shift in how businesses will be interacting with each other. This is important for any industry to take note, because it will affect the way you do business. Within the next 5 years, your employee-base will largely consist of a growing number of Millennials seeking to be understood and looking for different forms of motivation and direction than your past and current employee base is seeking. If your employee base is booming with Millennials, so is the employee base of your B2B customers. In the not so distant future, your buyers will greatly consist of Millennials driving the decision making in regard to which products and services they purchase for their organizations. As we have learned through [Google's survey](#), the B2B Marketing space is changing and it is essential to understand and adapt to this significant shift accordingly.

Millennials in the workforce think, and therefore interact, differently than previous generations because they have grown up in the digital age. Their communication preferences will most certainly change the

way business is done. This will be true whether your company is helmed by Millennials or you are seeking to connect with Millennial buyers for your B2B manufacturing company. The following will help break down these unknowns and bring much more clarity into this generation's approach to business.

Technology is at the forefront of the Millennial's lifestyle. Not surprisingly, it is also paramount to their business life as well, in such a way that they rely on and prefer this medium for collaboration, research, project management, and more. Understanding how to appeal to and interact with this generation on their turf (internet), could be your best kept secret against the competition.

Millennials view level of transparency you provide as a litmus test for trust. The more open your organization can be towards this prospect, the greater your chances are of earning trust, reliability and long-term partnerships. Millennials characteristically look to make a connection with business partners. It is important to show the human side of your organization that this generation can relate to. The Millennial generation greatly values an organizations' willingness to be transparent with information to the public in order to make better decisions.

Speed is not just about timing but about efficiency and productivity. The Millennial generation is concerned about improving efficiency and productivity with testing, systems and technology that expand well outside of software. Interacting effectively with and marketing to Millennials requires the understanding of their thinking about wanting to produce and cultivate a better system of processes.

Millennials seem to be driving significant change in management, purchase process and B2B buying experiences. The challenge is for your organization to understand and be willing to adapt to this sea change.

How Millennials Buy Differently

Millennials increasingly hold positions in the workforce in which they are making purchasing decisions for their company. This is important for manufacturers to be aware of because their shopping and buying habits are different from their predecessors. While their information seeking methods vary depending on the buying stage, as referenced above, most buyers, and more specifically, 70% of Millennial B2B buyers, start their search with a generic search looking for the product or for a solution to a problem. In contrast, Generation X buyers and Baby Boomers consult colleagues/personal networks and personal experience to give them industry information. And since Millennials are very digitally – and more specifically – internet savvy, this means they will be online seeking this information in traditional and not-so-traditional places. Tactics such as paid search campaigns on generic terms would be important to incorporate into an integrated marketing strategy. Blogs with topics related to the product or industry will out-perform ones that are more specific to your exact offering. But you may also consider platforms such as Reddit and SlideShare that are not yet so mainstream with other generations.

Since on average, B2B researchers do 12 searches prior to engaging on a specific brand's site (Google and Millward Brown Digital), strong search engine marketing and search engine optimization programs will put your business in front of the buyer during these searches. The more Millennials and others are exposed to your message, the more likely they are to engage. Perhaps different from other generations,

mobile and video search are also major tools used in the buying process for B2B Millennial buyers. Thirty-four percent of people involved in B2B purchasing are now using their mobile devices across each stage of the buying cycle. Seventy percent of those researching B2B products and services now use video across the purchase path, according to Google. To attract Millennials through video marketing, information should be both entertaining and educational.

Research done by the IBM Institute for Business Value uncovered that Millennial buyers are seeking out input and feedback from others before making a final purchase decision. A whopping 93% of this generation is thick in the digital grapevine, read online reviews, and rely on word of mouth before buying. And while Gen X shoppers are looking for a quicker transaction, Millennials are more interested in working with a manufacturer who can offer an easy and enjoyable and collaborative customer experience. In order of priority, ease of process flow appears to be more important than process speed. Millennials are looking for a company that is easy to do business with, that will work collaboratively, and that has industry and marketplace expertise, preferences that aren't significantly different than for their Baby Boomer predecessors. When comparing the top sources that influence the purchasing decisions for B2B products/services, IBM found that Baby Boomers and Millennials have similar influencers but prioritize them differently. Millennials placed organization data and recommendations from friends/family at the top of their list, followed by personal experience. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, stressed the importance of personal experience above all, which is followed by data and recommendations from industry experts.

Manufacturers working to attract this new generation of buyers should create a shopping and buying experience that is highly interactive and collaborative, yet easy and on a schedule. Millennials are also more likely to take advantage of their ease in use of the internet to gather more information than their B2B buyer predecessors. They want the information to be unique to the brand and relevant to the issues they care most about for the problems they are trying to solve or the solutions they are seeking to find. Since the Millennial buyer incorporates mobile devices in their shopping process, it would be wise for manufacturers to create an app or a mobile site that lends itself to easier access to necessary information and that creates an efficient buying process.

Today, Millennial buyers are still meeting face-to-face with company representatives; however, their preference, according to the IBM report, is to be doing more communication via email and other remote or asynchronous technologies. In a nutshell, they want the one-on-one interaction to get what they need, but they also may distance themselves as they continue to research and make their decision. The manufacturer who can deliver a flexible set of communication methods while still being personal, and show collaboration and industry expertise, will find themselves achieving a level of success that comes from a more engaged buyer and lower level of competition for their attention.

3 Tips to Effectively Market to Millennials

Now that we have covered some important characteristics of the Millennials and their buying habit differences from predecessor generations, let's take a look at a few guidelines that could help your

manufacturing company introduce its products and engage more effectively with Millennials. While there are more than three ways to effectively reach this market, these are the top three that GlobalDirective believes will have the greatest impact on manufacturing businesses.

1. Listen to the Chatter and Appeal to Their Interests

The success of any marketing campaign rests on the level of understanding you have about your target audience. Understand what topics relate to your Millennial buyer. One of the biggest mistakes businesses make is to assume that they know what their target market wants. Listen to the online chatter to uncover their true pain points. Show how your product/service can ease that pain. A genuine interest in social issues will grab the attention of this generation as much as the promotion of useful and entertaining content.

Millennials are looking for businesses that offer thought provoking and intelligent information within their industry. Remember, first they research the industry then they move onto specific businesses. Once your company has been identified as a business of interest, your marketing and messaging should shift from industry related to brand specific marketing. At this stage you want to make sure your product or service is addressing at least one of your buyer's needs. Make sure your message helps them understand how your product can add value to them, how it can help make them look good at work, and be informative yet entertaining. This helps drive value to the conversation with Millennials.

Don't take our word for it. Monitor the tone and context of online conversations to identify how Millennials interact with your industry. In doing so, you will be developing an understanding of how to frame a message that appeals best to your target audience.

2. Enhance the Social Experience by Building Community and Social Credibility

Millennials grew up with social media; therefore properly incorporating this platform into your strategy is essential to success. Far too often businesses think that if they build it they will come. As you may have learned, it's not that easy. Merely having a website and a social media presence is not good enough to establish a relationship with your buyers. A sustainable social strategy requires engaging in conversation with your market.

- Make sure you are responding to the comments being made by your customers.
- Build your business as an industry expert by offering solutions to the buyers' problems through social media.
- Allow your audience to ideate along with you on your product development. By starting conversations around your product and gathering feedback from Millennials, you also increase their engagement levels. Your audience will love the chance to have a voice and get involved with your brand.

When done correctly, social media can be an effective tool to build your credibility with Millennials. Social proof often stands as a testament of how much your products satisfy the needs of your customers. For Millennials, social proof is a trust indicator showing them what their peers think about the product. Remember, as they get further down the buying funnel they place a high value on recommendations from family and friends, even in B2B purchases. So whether it is comments or shares on Facebook, retweets or comments on Twitter, reviews of products on your website or review sites, all these social activities build and deepen relationships with your customers. Display the tweets or Facebook posts related to your products on your website for further verification of this social proof.

3. Cross Channel / Integrated Marketing

Millennials consume content across multiple devices. Implement a cross-channel digital marketing plan to maximize your digital marketing efforts with Millennials. This way, whether they are on their workstation, their mobiles or tablets, Millennials who are prone to always stay connected will have access to your message. Even while at work, this generation is using their mobile devices to do research related to their job function. By creating a cross channel marketing plan which encompasses email, video, and various digital programs, you can see increased engagement and conversions. Since Millennials use a mixture of devices to find more information about your industry and product category, you can no longer concentrate on a single channel for success. You have to create a seamless customer experience across numerous devices.

When your message isn't integrated across channels it can cause consumer confusion. This happens when you plan different marketing strategies for each channel (mobile, email, social media, etc...). When your message is segregated it is unclear, unorganized and runs the risk of being overlooked and therefore not communicated to your target market. Money is wasted and return on investment is low when your message is fragmented.

Conclusion

Marketing to Millennials in the manufacturing sector must be created so that it grabs the attention of your market in 10 seconds; otherwise, they will move on. Millennials have reported that content is turning them off because it is too long, doesn't solve their problem, is sales-driven and is not tailored. So how do B2B manufacturers write and deliver relevant marketing programs that generate leads? Millennials respond favorably to content that is useful, entertaining, educational, tailored to their age and tailored to their cultural interests. According to News Creeds Millennial Survey, 31% of Millennials say that they will buy from a company if the content teaches them something. The best way for a company to develop a marketing program that meets these criteria is to create detailed personas. A persona will help you to more deeply understand who your audience is and what they care about so that you can create marketing programs that are relevant to them.