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Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)

December 8, 2016 Thursday

6 tips for marketing to millennials

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SECTION: A; Pg. 18

LENGTH: 1001 words

There are nearly 80 million millennials in the U.S. today - that's almost one-fourth of the total population. With an annual buying power of \$200 billion, it's becoming increasingly important for marketers to build their strategies around what millennials respond to.

According to Pew Research Center, millennials as a whole are collaborative, self-expressive, optimistic, mobile, social and more ethnically and racially diverse than older generations. With such a diverse group, which often is misunderstood and stereotyped, it can be hard to know how to **connect** with this generation.

However, there are certain characteristics that are common among nearly all millennials; and those who do not fit the mold can and should be targeted through more personalized marketing efforts.

"If you want to **connect** with millennials, then you're going to have to rethink the way you advertise and market your product to them. Instead of traditional **advertising**, which they ignore, brands have to publish authentic content as a way of **building trust and loyalty** with this extremely important and influential demographic."

- Dan Schawbel, founder of Millennial Branding and New York Times best-selling author of "Promote Yourself"

Here are six ways to **connect** with millennials through your marketing efforts:

Go mobile: More than 85 percent of millennials own smartphones. Furthermore, 67 percent of millennials report that they use their smartphones to access the internet, spending an average of 14.5 hours a day online. If you want to reach millennials, your marketing must be mobile. From your website to email to your social channels, content should be optimized for mobile consumption, with emphasis on reaching this audience throughout the day on their mobile devices. Additionally, finding ways to integrate your **advertising** natively into popular mobile applications is a great way to reach millennials.

Post videos online: Millennials are the most active video viewers of any U.S. age group. Eighty percent of millennials use video content to help them decide what to purchase, seven out of 10 millennials are likely to watch a company video when shopping online and 76 percent of them follow brands on YouTube. When marketing to millennials, video must be an essential component of your marketing mix. When it comes to topics, consider product demos and customer stories and avoid videos that are overtly promotional. It's important to keep in mind that nearly half of millennials only watch videos on their mobile device, so make sure your video content and captions are optimized for mobile devices.

Collaborate on social media: Millennials want to engage with brands on social media and contribute to product ideas.

According to The Millennial **Consumer** study, 62 percent of millennials say that if a brand engages with them on social

networks, they are more likely to become a customer. Forty-three percent say Facebook is the social network that most influences their spending habits, followed by Instagram and Pinterest. Additionally, 42 percent said they are interested in helping companies develop future products and services, and nearly half (44 percent) of millennials are willing to promote products or services through social media in exchange for rewards. Focus on building relationships with your millennial audience by fostering a community of collaboration, sharing and feedback, then reward them for their engagement.

Leverage (millennial) influencers: Roughly 95 percent of millennials say that friends are the most credible source of product information, and according to the Engaging Millennials: Trust and Attention Survey, 84 percent of millennials do not like traditional **advertising**. They trust their closest friends the most, and **advertising** and salespeople the least. Therefore, the best way to **connect** with millennials is through other millennials. Your marketing should focus on creating brand evangelists who will spread the word on your behalf, as well as collaborating with millennial influencers. Consider an influencer strategy that uses social media to **connect** with and activate your core millennial audience through their shared interests on the channels they love.

Get personal: This generation demands more customer-driven, personalized marketing than any other generation before it. Millennials want to know a brand is paying attention to their specific needs. One way to do this is to target social groups instead of life stages. Millennials are a nontraditional generation and pride themselves on taking the path less traveled. Instead of targeting by traditional life stages ("marriage," "new homeowner," etc.), consider creating highly personalized ads targeting their interests, identifying with causes they support, or leveraging the social influencers they follow. Millennials are much more likely to **connect** with a social identity than they are to identify with a specific traditional life stage.

Be authentic: Finally, you need to be open and honest. Millennials are incredibly good at identifying lies and ulterior motives. Don't say you are authentic - **be authentic by embracing content marketing as a core communications strategy**. Give your audience the content they want, in their language, from the people they **trust**. Aim to inspire, inform and entertain through your social content and facilitate creative expression and community over promotional gimmicks at any cost. Lastly, encourage, don't control, social conversations, and allow your fans to become your true brand.

Marketing to millennials doesn't have to be hard. By understanding what makes one of the most misunderstood generations tick, you can adjust your strategy to make a connection that sticks. Millennials are an incredibly diverse group, and **targeting their specific needs will help you connect with them on a more personal level**. Hillary Ferry is Digital Marketing Director at Two Rivers Marketing, of Des Moines. It is a division of Woodward Communications Inc., parent company of the Telegraph Herald.

LOAD-DATE: December 8, 2016

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper