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Why you should target Gen C, not millennials; The 'connected consumer' is everywhere

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The reign of the millennial is over - and not a moment too soon.

I've thought and written a lot about millennials over the years. As the head of a social media management platform, I know that they make up a big chunk of our own employees and our millions of users. And it's clear that they bring real assets and expectations to the table, from digital savvy to a desire for collaboration and transparency.

But here's the thing. These traits aren't unique to millennials and never have been. You don't have to be born from 1980-2000 to live on your iPhone or embrace social media. And young people aren't the only ones who seek out purpose in their careers, not just a paycheck, or who want to make a difference.

I've come to realize that, in many ways, the concept of millennials is just too limiting. Businesses have been encouraged to pour resources into **marketing** to this narrow demographic. HR teams have set their sights on recruiting millennials and catering to millennial tastes. But they're missing the bigger picture.

Fortunately, there is an alternative. This concept isn't new, exactly. But it hasn't gotten the attention it deserves. For businesses, it's time to take notice of a new wave of consumers. I'm talking about Generation C.

UNDERSTANDING GEN C Back in 2012, digital analyst Brian Solis defined Generation C as the "connected consumer." He pointed out that anyone who integrates technology into their daily routine, regardless of age, shares certain qualities. "It is how people embrace technology, from social networks to smartphones to intelligent appliances, that contributes to the digital lifestyle that is now synonymous with Gen C," he said.

Depending on whom you talk to, the "C" in Gen C can refer to everything from "collaboration" to "community," "computerized," and "content." At the most fundamental level, however, I like to think that Gen C stands for **connectivity**.

Critically, Gen C isn't an age group at all; it's a mindset. There's no cutoff date. You can be 15 years old or 85 years old and still be a full-fledged member. Nor is it defined by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, geography or any of the classic demographic markers.

What sets Gen C apart is connectivity, in its fullest sense.

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Members are not merely online - they're active and engaged in online communities, from the familiar social networks to product review sites. They're not just consuming content, they're creating and curating it. I'd like to emphasize that these trends aren't new. But all too often, we ascribe these traits just to millennials. The Gen C concept is useful because it does away with these arbitrary age brackets.

CONNECTING WITH GEN C Generation C lives on digital media. They move seamlessly from laptop to tablet to smartphone, connected every waking minute, often on multiple platforms. More important than which devices Gen C are using, however, is how they're using them - as tools for participation, not just passive consumption.

Streaming video and social media dominate their time spent online. Rather than relying on traditional news sources, they get their information from social media feeds - algorithmic streams on **Facebook**, Twitter, LinkedIn and other networks that aggregate preferences from their friends and followers.

Responding and interacting - through comments, emojis, texts and Tweets - is as important as reading or watching. Creating is as critical as consuming.

Getting to us (I definitely consider myself a member) depends on reaching us where we live. Traditional media don't cut it. Even conventional digital ads and **marketing** fall flat for this savvy, ad-blocking audience. **We trust, above all, content shared on our personal networks.** For businesses, this is the holy grail and the highest stamp of approval: a word-of-mouth recommendation on **Facebook**, a creative meme that goes viral on Twitter, a thumbs up from a trusted **Influencer**.

REACHING GEN C It ultimately means having a keen understanding of **click-worthy** - the art of creating shareable, entertaining, useful and highly visual content. In an era in which information and entertainment sources are unlimited, hijacking attention spans with something as mundane as an ad isn't going to happen. **Facebook**, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn ... this is the neural network through which Gen C gauges and engages the world, both close to home and across the globe. Any effort to connect with Gen C starts there.

WHAT'S NEXT? A little more than a decade ago, Gen C's ranks were likely small - just a dedicated wave of early adopters plunging into the world of social media and digital content creation. Today, however, the reality is that Gen C is everywhere. Plenty of millennials belong to this group, but so do lots of Gen-Xers and Yers, not to mention lots of boomers. For companies, looking at consumers and employees in terms of strict age parameters simply no longer makes sense. Long live Generation C.

Financial Post Ryan Holmes, CEO of Hootsuite, is an angel investor and adviser, and mentors startups and entrepreneurs. [Twitter.com/invoker](https://twitter.com/invoker); linkedin.com/in/influencer/2967511-Ryan-Holmes !@COPYRIGHT=© 2017 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

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