

AS SEEN IN
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TAPPING THE MILLENNIAL MARKET

2019 is reportedly the year that Millennials will overtake the Baby Boomers as the largest population by generation. Here's what it means for you.

BY MARK
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The generational shift is expected to be subtle as these two groups swap places; the Boomers are estimated to drop to 73 million people, while the Millennials are hanging with 74 million. While the tipping point may seem like a mere one million, the milestone is solidifying the new and different ways we go to the market and sell.

There is a startling difference that the Millennial crowd brings to the sales process — and it differs from all generations preceding them. This group is both blazing the sales trail that future generations will follow, and they are dragging their senior generations (Boomers included) with them.

DEFINING THE TARGET

The dates that define when generations begin and end can fluctuate according to the source of information. However, uniquely, because of their immense size, both Millennials and Boomers have subgroups.

The Boomers are comprised of the “Baby Boomers” (those born between 1946-1954)

and “Generation Jones” (those born between 1955-1965).

The Millennials subgroups are the “Early Millennial” (those born between 1980-1987) and the “Recessionist Millennial” (those born between 1988-1995). The sales and marketing requirements for each of these client types will vary as you seek to serve these four important demographics. The takeaway is that the successful strategies used for the “Early Millennial” will also work — with minor modifications — with other demographic groups.

OLD SALES TACTICS WON'T PRODUCE RESULTS

The goal is to first attract Millennial clients, and then help them make a purchase. The one activity to avoid with this group is just trying to sell to them. That might seem like odd counsel coming from a lifelong sales guy, but hear me out. Polished interpersonal skills are still required to obtain the results you want, but you must avoid being salesy. The use of fast-talking, hard pitch sales presentations are obsolete. These manipulative approaches of

yesteryear are being replaced with authentic trust-building actions.

The marketing activities that build trust with clients in 2019 and beyond will happen long before they enter your showroom — and even before they think of you as a “trusted resource.” This is why the efforts of the marketing and sales team must be in unison from product knowledge to rapport building and of course sharing your company's unique story.

TRUST THE EXPERT

When a showroom and their team members actively demonstrate that they are legitimate experts in their fields, they create trust in the marketplace. Buyers have been increasingly exposed to undereducated, non-motivated sales clerks in every industry. They waste the client's precious time, and this has eroded their faith to that of an untrusting pessimist who sees no value in the old sales interaction. This negative attitude combined with lower foot traffic requires that we communicate trust to the client and reach them where they are and before we meet them.

“Reach” once meant placing big display ads in the newspaper, airing TV commercials, and posting billboards. The public is increasingly becoming digitally dependent, which means digital platforms are the first place to begin building client trust.

A simple strategy that blends the efforts of sales and marketing in a way that builds trust is by answering typical buyer questions *before* they ask them. These questions include the merchandise you bring to market, the reasons why you beat your competitors, and how your particular sales process works to benefit them. The answers you provide should be shared on all the digital platforms you use as well as on your website.

When consumers want to know anything on any subject, the place they visit first is Google.

“Google has 3.5 billion daily searches, which equates to 1.2 trillion searches per year,” according to Internet Live Stats. Thus, when clients want to know what products are available, they search for it — and when they are engaged in their search, they also want to discover the reasons why they should buy the item. As modern merchants we must make the information available that expresses why to buy from you rather than a competitor.

These client searches launch their digital education on style, color trends, and of course pricing. Providing transparent answers to all the “Why” questions is how to build digital trust. Since



this generation tends to be skeptical, expect that they will fact-check your statements and claims right in front of you, phone in hand, when visiting your showroom. When the answers to their discovery questions are the same on both your digital marketing platform as it is in person from your sales team, trust grows exponentially.

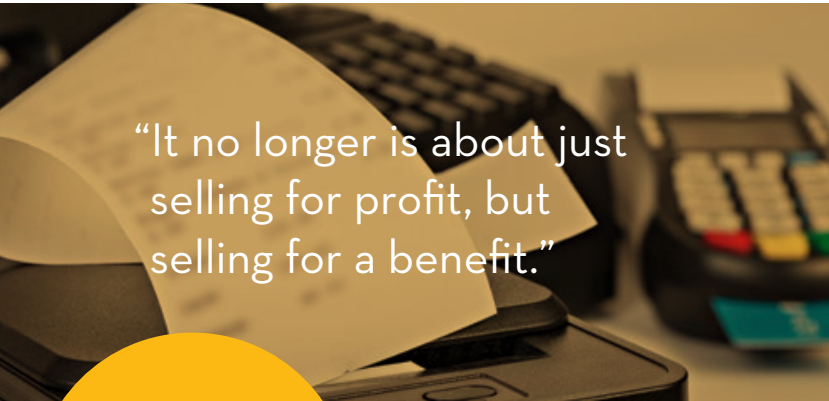
Use your specific content creation to educate customers and provide solutions to typical issues that will guide them through potential problems and pitfalls. This paves the way to building client trust. While this might seem like a simple approach, I assure you it takes hard work, planning, and superb communication skills.

BE THEIR COUNSELOR

The Millennial market, and the generations riding along with them, come to the showroom seeking guidance and confirmation of the information they found out on their own. Two specific characteristics drive this group to a brick and mortar store; they are there to trial and test what they have seen online, or they have a problem that they have not found a solution for online. The issues they have will vary as widely as the clients you attract, but the unifier is they want you to be their problem-solver.

The confidence that showrooms are creating digitally matters. Each effort that demonstrates that the showroom's staff are experts will solidify the need for clients to go to the “trustworthy” brick-and-mortar showroom to complete their quest.

The
Millennial
Market
Strategy
Appeals to
Boomers,
Too!



“It no longer is about just selling for profit, but selling for a benefit.”

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This does not mean that educated clients are walking in to buy what you have, but they are walking in to verify what they know and discover if you know more. This is the time to use a soft, well-thought-out, persuasive process.

Demonstrating your expert status is more important than the brands you sell. The days of using a complex sale process are over; simplicity and honesty will help you make the entire sales interaction acceptable to the client. You do this by making your complete sales experience very comfortable.

To be the counselor that Millennials want requires that stumbling blocks and speed bumps in the process are clearly communicated upfront with no surprises. Reinforcing your counselor position involves more than memorizing the latest PK from a vendor's catalog. In fact, that is the least impressive way to garner the business of this well-researched group. Instead, focus on the associated details of the products you are presenting, such as on-trend designs, style preferences, accents, colors, and global influences.

When it comes to home décor, Millennials have a desire for fashion that is affordable. The decorating ideas they love are impacted by the shows they watch, the images they pin to their idea boards, and the social media pages they follow. They want their spaces to be “Insta-Worthy” (i.e. attractive enough to post images on Instagram) and an accurate reflection of who they are and the experiences they have had or wish to have.

GIVE BEFORE YOU TAKE

Millennials like to give back to the world and leave a small carbon footprint. If the products you're presenting are made from renewable or recycled

resources, that is an attractive benefit. How your business is interwoven into the community is a desirable feature, and even the way you handle your trash can mean something. How the sale of an item can positively affect the upstream resource or the profits generated from the sale makes a difference to a local group is also an appealing benefit.

Sharing the positive influence your showroom has had on the local community will solidify that purchasing from you is a benefit to all. These activities are the foundation of the marketing sales story you tell. The result is the client will feel good about buying from you and the sales force will be proud to be part of the team and community.

I often wonder why Millennials, or any group for that matter, who are concerned with environmental impact will buy items like lighting, plumbing fixtures, and furniture online. Think of the process.

The purchase is made and the item delivered (1st trip). There may be one insignificant problem, let's say a missing part, or they just don't like their choice. The online seller will often send a call tag to pick up the item (2nd trip) and if it is being replaced, send another complete item (3rd trip). Often that returned item is sent to be field-destroyed (additional environmental impact) or it is bundled with other things and sent to a jobber to dispose of in a different market (4th & 5th trip, possibly more).

Often for a single replacement part that is most likely in your showroom, the client is inconvenienced, and the “defective item” now has a carbon footprint that is more like a well-trodden carbon path to their doorway. By the way, this is a great selling story you can use, and everyone with online purchasing experience knows it is true.

THE SKILLS

Here is a short list of skills that today's showroom salesperson needs to be successful:

- ☞ Be honest and transparent.
- ☞ Have unparalleled product knowledge melded with superb selling skills.
- ☞ Be tech savvy & socially out there.
- ☞ Be prepared to create constructive tension.
- ☞ Develop your emotional intelligence (EQ)

Honing these talents will make showroom sales teams appealing to everyone who comes into the showroom.

As always, happy selling! ❖

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