

## Shifting Priorities: Millennials and Branding

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How do you solve a problem like the Millennials? Digitally savvy, informed, impact-conscious, and always connected, consumers born between 1980 and 2000 have created [significant challenges for brand owners](#). Unlike previous generations, the Millennials (also known as “Generation Y”) are very skeptical of advertising and large companies. They expect to be heard, have immediate feedback, and instant gratification. Thus, strategies for “reaching” these consumers must be tailored differently.

Going about marketing, portfolio management and general branding the same way as was done for the Baby Boomers and Generation X will not work for those consumers currently in their teens through thirties. For some companies, the shift in consumption means rebranding or creating spin-offs that are aimed at reaching Generation Y. One example is Whole Foods Market Inc., which in June 2015, announced that it will have a new chain of lower-priced stores called “365 by Whole Foods Market.” This new brand of grocery stores will, according to its executives, “cater to a younger generation of shoppers who are still interested in organic and natural foods but want a different shopping experience.” Whole Foods has already applied to register with the USPTO two marks associated with this new brand in numerous classes.

So what can a company do to increase its brand coverage and/or change to reach this new generation? First, to a group that spends a considerable amount of time online and social networking, normal streams of advertising simply may not have the impact they once did. Mobile and digital brand efforts are essential to reach the younger generation.

Second, companies need to acknowledge that Millennials are market savvy and weary of brands and adjust accordingly. A study released in January showed that only one percent of those surveyed found that “a compelling advertisement would make them trust a brand more.” Further, they “believe that advertising is all spin and not authentic.” On a positive note, many Millennials want to engage with brands via social media and, once they find a brand they like, they are loyal.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Millennials are image conscious and believe that the companies from which their goods are purchased should be as well. In the same report mentioned above, 75 percent of Millennials surveyed said that it is important that companies give back to society – not just make a profit. Brands would be wise to focus some of their attention on such endeavors.

The new consumer is one that buys differently: they research, they take into consideration impact, and they are skeptical of advertising. To reach this audience, companies must retool their efforts to

build and maintain their brands. Part of the retooling should involve analyzing one's trademark portfolio and – if necessary and as part of an overall brand shift or expansion – applying to register new trademarks and trade dress aimed at the younger generation.

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