

**Millennial (noun):** *Anyone born between 1976 and 2000.*



# Are you courting **Millennials?**

## Be careful what you wish for.

By Tom Robinson

Generation X	Millennials
The Pill and legalized abortion	"Have you hugged your child today?"
Absentee parents and the rise of the non-traditional family	"Helicopter Parents"
Distrustful	Respectful of authority and rules
Increasing teen crime rates, drug use, pregnancy	Decreasing crime rates, less drug use, teen pregnancy decreasing
Individualistic	Prefer teams
Unstructured childhood	Preference for structured activities
A "lost" generation	A "found" generation
Pessimists	Optimists
Talkers	Doers
Uncertain	Confident

the 76 million children born between 1946 and 1964.

Psychology researcher Jean Twenge explains that generational changes occur in a linear fashion over relatively long periods of time. While race and socio-economics are factors, the year in which one is born can account for twice the effect on personality and behavior as do the parents who raised the child.

John Geraci ran the Harris Interactive Youth poll for a decade. Now at his own research company, he works closely with Neil Howe, who along with William Strauss, authored the seminal treatise *Millennials Go to College*. In that work, a grid helped illustrate how generations can differ significantly. Vive la difference! (Chart on left.)

**With Millennial, you get parent**

**N**OW GEN-XERS—not Boomers—are the predominant parental generation of college undergraduates. They are hyper-involved in nearly all aspects of their children's lives. Unlike previous generations who longed for freedom from parental incursion, Millennial children consider their parents to be friends. In many ways, Gen-X parents act more like peers than parents.

The annual UCLA Study of American Freshmen reveals that the majority of freshmen consider appropriate their parents' participation in their college careers. Of the freshmen surveyed, 84 percent reported parental involvement

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**T**HE MILLENNIALS are as big a generation as the Baby Boomers, but the hardly resemble each other. Psychologists can define their values, attitudes and behaviors. Admissions offices are cracking the code on how to communicate with them. Are you willing to accommodate the stringent demands to recruit them? More importantly, how well will you manage them when they show up on campus?

Meet four generational experts who can shed light on a large, talented and vexing cohort.

Jean Twenge is a research psychologist and author whose study of two million young people from the 1930s to the present puts her on some firm ground. Carol Phillips owns a consultancy that specializes in communicating with and marketing to youth. Both women also teach on campuses. John Geraci is a researcher who ran Harris Interactive's youth marketing division for a decade. Tony Sgro oversees student-run marketing programs in 600 colleges that develop real peer-to-peer campaigns for leading global companies.

**Understanding generational gaps**

**M**ILLENNIALS are also referred to as Generation Y, the Net Generation, the Me Generation

and Echo Boomers. The term Generation Y first appeared in an August 1993 *Advertising Age* editorial about those 75 million (or so) children born between 1980 and 1995. The generation's range has changed greatly since then, to include, in many cases, anyone born as early as 1976 and late as 2000.

By contrast, Generation X is the 50+ million born between 1965 and 1976. Baby Boomer is the term used to describe

**Acknowledging the role of parents, Geraci characterizes the evolution of youth marketing thusly:**

1950s and 1960s	"Children are to be seen and not heard."
1970s	"Hey! There are a lot of young people, let's get to them through their parents!"
1980s and 1990s	"The Echo Boom is here! Who needs to talk to parents, let's market straight to youth!"
2000s and beyond	"Whoa! Let's think about parents and children as a collaborative unit!"



SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

## Jean Twenge

Associate professor

**EXPERTISE** Research psychologist Twenge authored *Generation Me* using a mammoth database of 2,000,000 young people and the questionnaires they've completed from the 1930s to the present. Topics surveyed include self-esteem, narcissism, expectations for the future and many others.

### How big a factor is generation?

The data show that most changes are linear and build slowly. So there are small differences between people born 10 years apart, bigger ones for 20 years and really big ones for a 50-year generation gap. In studies of twins, genetics explains about 50 percent of the variance in personality traits; family environment explains 5–10 percent; and generation gaps of 40–50 years explain 20 percent. People are shocked when they discover that the year in which you were born has double the influence on your personality than the parents who raised you. Yet when you realize how much culture has changed in that time, it makes sense.

### How might generational issues play out in the college classroom?

You certainly see the generational shift in teaching styles and technology. Today, it's more interactive, with students using clickers, doing presentations and contributing to the discussion. Perhaps the biggest change is a lack of respect for authority. Generation Me feels special and entitled, and expects schools to make exceptions for them. One of my students wanted to take a test early so he could go to Las Vegas for his birthday. Yet we must keep in mind that GenMe didn't raise themselves. Parents and media have told them they're special since they were born.

### How should instructors adapt their style of teaching?

Learning by doing is effective for this generation. Independence and taking initiative is not their strong suit, so online courses are not as useful as interaction with professors and peers. Older instructors might well use more interactivity and technology. Younger instructors have an advantage in that they share similar cultural reference points and comfort with technology.

### How far should colleges go to accommodate Millennials?

This phenomenon is not temporary. Look around. Celebrity culture is everywhere; plastic surgery is up; the personal savings rate is negative for the first time since the Depression. Unless there is a big culture change, the trend toward more individualism and more narcissism will continue. Numerically, this generation is as big as the Boomers. Colleges and instructors should be willing to provide the amenities and adapt technologies. If we teach in a different way that's fine. But we should not compromise standards for learning.

### Should colleges help prepare Millennials for work?

The requirement for self-starting and respect for some kind of authority will always be needed in the workplace. College is a natural environment to test a student's responsibility to study for an exam, or even show up for class. Instructors can assign work that requires students to think for themselves, meet due dates and get accustomed to criticism.

was in the "right amount" in their decision to attend college, 80.5 percent in their decision to attend the college at which they enrolled and 77.5 percent in dealing with college officials. Nearly one in four freshmen report that their parents had "too little" involvement in helping them select college courses, and 22.5 percent say their parents were not involved enough in helping choose college activities.

Carol Phillips of BrandAmplitude says that parents are not only a key part of the decision team, they often initiate. They make lists. They supervise campus visits. They spend a lot of time with other

parents going through the same process. They develop their own impression of the schools. Phillips characterizes parents as highly critical of the onerous, convoluted college admissions and financial aid gauntlet, so they feel they have no choice but to be involved.

### Implications for campus recruiting

**S**AVVY ADMISSIONS OFFICERS have been applying the best practices of youth marketing, including sophisticated segmentation strategies, data mining, customer relationship marketing and sales sequencing for some time (see

a related article on salesmanship in the May 2007 issue of *The Greentree Gazette*). Yet the changes are occurring so rapidly, recruiting strategies must be responsive.

Millennials are obviously technology-oriented, and marketers are shifting from television and e-mail to more individualized and personalized mobile marketing channels like podcasts and cell phones. As social networking explodes, these same marketers are falling all over themselves to create ads and commercial space in MySpace, Facebook, Second Life and YouTube.

But some youth marketing experts caution that having a presence is not a



CRUX RESEARCH

## John Geraci

President

**EXPERTISE** Geraci has 18 years of market research experience as head of the youth division of Harris Interactive and now with his own company.

### **In what ways do Millennials differ from Gen-Xers?**

Gen-X was in some ways an unwanted generation. As they came of age, the nation was advocating Zero Population Growth; the pill was developed and *Roe v. Wade* served to prevent children from being born. The American family and the economy were in trouble. Even in popular culture, children were often portrayed as evil. This has stuck with Gen-X, and they remain very independent, entrepreneurial and guarded. Fast forward to the '80s and '90s, when Millennials came of age. Fertility rates increased, and 'Baby on Board' signs identified the minivans of soccer moms. The child became the hero of the household in a nurturing culture. Millennials have consequently become collaborative, an open, tolerant, optimistic generation.

### **How are Millennials a product of their Boomer and Gen-X parents?**

Every generation tries to correct what they see as the mistakes of their parents. As much as they revere their parents, Millennials see Boomers as somewhat disingenuous. Millennials have seen their parents try to "do it all"—and not necessarily succeed. Pressured by their parents to succeed, Millennials are also sheltered by them. Inevitably they will succeed on their own terms and not those of their parents.

### **What other factors define this generation?**

Although Millennials share some culture with their parents, they actually share more values with the GI generation, often called the Greatest Generation. Millennials share the GI's team-orientation, a sense of honor and duty and structure, a willingness to work within the system. Youth generations tend to replace what's being lost from the dying generation.

### **Are colleges adapting to the Millennials and their parents?**

In 2000, when the Millennials first showed up on campus, colleges were taken aback. It took a couple years to recognize the break from Gen-X. Now colleges are getting it right, but they are faced with another abrupt change. Gen-Xers—not Boomers—are now the parents of the Millennials in college. These hyper-involved parents communicate with their college kids 12 times a week, are involved in course selection decisions, and will even advocate for their child's grades. Gen-X parents feel they have a right to do this because of the financial and personal investment they have in the child. We think this will soon fundamentally change how college selection decisions are made. Kids and parents care a lot more about their return on investment.

### **Will social networking produce tools for college evaluations?**

High school students looking for college information may seek it out through a specific site like the College Board or *Next Step*, or on dedicated areas on Facebook or MySpace. There is an enormous opportunity for colleges to use this technology to put a prospective student in touch with students already going to that school. Social networking online will allow friends to maintain connections longer. That has many implications for the alumni office.

guarantee of success and may even backfire. According to Crux Research polling, two-thirds of teens are suspicious of advertising, and can sniff out covert attempts to sidle up to them. For many, their meaningful contacts with adults are limited to parents and teachers. Peers are their primary source of information. Even so, Crux data indicate that only about a third would be very or somewhat likely to purchase a product recommended by a close friend.

Phillips recommends focusing the message on outcomes: what you can do with your degree, which graduates have been successful and what kind of return you can expect on the investment. She likes social networking, but she believes colleges should establish their own networks to put prospective students, current student and alumni together in a context away from Facebook or MySpace.

Focus persuasion techniques on the

individual, Twenge suggests. "University of You." "An army of one." YouTube's slogan is "Broadcast yourself," and it's no coincidence that a website called MySpace is popular.

Tony Sgro, who began using students to create campaigns aimed at other students back in the 1980s, sees the value of peers creating messages that ring true. Focus on the critical issues with an authenticity unequaled by older marketers trying to be cool.



UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

## Carol Phillips

Marketing professor

**EXPERTISE** She is a Trifecta of marketing professor, president of the BrandAmplitude consultancy specializing in youth marketing, and mother of a high school student currently shopping for colleges.

### Is college education a purchase?

I ask my marketing students 'What's the biggest purchase you've ever made?' and they say a car, a computer, a vacation. They never say college.

### How does price factor into the decision?

Pricing is relatively obscure. You don't know the real price until the decision is made. I know some exceptional students aiming low because of perceived expense. Harvard might ultimately be cheaper, yet they end up at Western Michigan without trying. It's a lost opportunity on both sides.

### Are colleges marketing the right things?

Schools operate under the pretext of students being 'there to learn.' Campus materials almost ignore what grads go on to do, what careers are available, how competitive they can be after graduation or the type of companies that recruit on campus. Students want to know what they will be able to do with the education. Parents want to know the ROI of this major expenditure.

### How can colleges demonstrate successful outcomes?

Michigan talks about successful alumni like James Earl Jones and others who have gone on to do exceptional things. George Washington University plays up students securing internships and meaningful contacts at ESPN, the White House and Capitol Hill. On the big family visitation day, Oberlin College holds a panel discussion with faculty and students. I invited an ad agency to speak to my class. Instead of the bosses, they sent the junior team. They looked like recent grads. They were being successful. And students felt, "I can be like that."

### What opportunities are there for word-of-mouth?

For Millennials, peer recommendations are paramount and social networks are dominant. Student tour guides should be following up with visiting students and vice-versa. Colleges are not taking advantage of their current students' friends at their old high school who want to know 'what's it like to go there?' Millennials' so-called helicopter parents have their own network. They share stories, information and opinions as they spend time together at PTA meetings, band concerts and athletic events. Nine innings is a long time.

### How do parents figure in the admission process?

It takes a family. Parents are key part of the decision team—often the initiator. Their involvement is mandatory to help manage the convoluted college admissions and financial aid application process...which is terrible and needs to be fixed. They take students to visit, but have their own impression of the school. Many schools are doing a good job with parent events during campus visits. My advice is start earlier—relationship building leads to better decisions for everyone.

One 1990s holdover that isn't going away is providing first class amenities on campus. Twenge says that Millennials are from small families and have always had their own rooms. They have no inclination for communal living. The single room or suite-style dorm with all the bells and whistles still appeals. That same expectation of privacy also plays out when unwanted outsiders crash their cell phones or adults try to become authorized as "friends" in their social networks.

### Adapting teaching styles

**T**HE GAZETTE has previously reported on the need for andragogy alternatives that accommodate the learning styles of adult learners who do not match the profile of the typical 18-22-year-old first time college student. Instructors and curriculum developers might also need some revision of their pedagogy for Millennial students, whose learning styles differ radically from previous Boomers and X-ers.

Jean Twenge suggests that learning-

by-doing is effective for this generation. Independence and initiative is not their strong suit. Online courses may not be viewed as useful as interaction with professors and peers.

Diane Skiba and Amy Barton at the University of Colorado published *Adapting Your Teaching to Accommodate the Net Generation of Learners*, in a journal aimed specifically at nursing instructors. The principles can apply to many other teaching situations.



**EDVENTURE PARTNERS**

**Tony Sgro**

CEO

**EXPERTISE** Former world-ranked professional freestyle skier and camp director, Sgro started student intern programs in the 1980s. He now helps clients link products to youth markets through peer-to-peer strategies developed by college students. The best known of these may be the *Chevy Super Bowl College Ad Challenge*.

**Explain the leap from professional hotdog skier to higher education.**

It was a classic case of the old adage 'success happens when opportunity meets preparation.' Helping young people develop competitive skills at ski camps around the world was the preparation. I was not an educator, but I was a teacher. When the opportunity arose, I had a natural inclination to see how these skills could play out in the classroom.

**When did you realize the value students can deliver?**

When I became the Ski School Director at Squaw Valley USA, I had to do significant things...without significant budget. I recognized the enthusiasm college students had for the sport, so I started an internship program at neighboring Chico State. In exchange for a lift ticket, students could create, build and staff skiing events. How cool was that?

**How did EdVenture Partners get started?**

I became VP, Sales & Marketing at Any Mountain, a major sports retailer, and developed an internship program at San Jose State, and later at Santa Clara University. Fifty interns, working like clockwork, earned credit while doing meaningful work, and the EdVenture blueprint was forming in my brain. A General Motors zone manager saw our work, and said, "We have a ski car and you have skiers. Let's meet." He was so impressed with the work our students did for GM, he suggested we make a real business of it. I started part-time in my living room with the help my wife, and with the continued support of GM, we built a company.

**Are there obstacles when working with colleges?**

Students must go through the same four steps of any creative group dynamic: forming, storming, norming and adjourning. Getting a real marketing campaign done in a 15-week semester is a challenge. Sometimes an enthusiastic faculty member wants to be the agency president, instead of accepting that we're all about peer-to-peer strategies. Meanwhile, when students work in teams, it can be difficult to be equitable in grading individuals.

**How big is the EdVenture Partners network now?**

We expanded our marketing internship with other educational offerings, such as a national case study competition. Today, 600 schools are involved. Some 55,000 students have participated, and our client roster has expanded to include Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Honda, the Moroccan American Trade and Investment Center, PayPal, L. L. Bean and others. We are also working with the U.S. Department of Defense, Homeland Security and Canada's police force to recruit young people into security careers. And we'll be expanding to Europe and Asia.

**Preparing them for work and careers**

**M**ILLENNIALS HAVE SKILLS and talents that can bring vitality and productivity to the workplace. Many of them are techno-savvy and capable of finding and processing amazing amounts of information. Because their field of communication is more expansive than previous generations, they are adept at global and diversity issues. With online social networks they can reach well beyond the confines of geography to establish relationships. They are team-oriented and adroit multi-taskers.

University of Illinois, Chicago senior Millie Frawley is involved in a student marketing competition sponsored by EdVenture. Partners "Our group of 25 students worked on the Honda project and it was ours to own. We did everything. Presenting our marketing campaign to some of the top Honda executives was a great experience." Tom Peyton, senior manager of Honda's marketing, believes that Honda's team likewise gained from the student partnership. "The biggest thing we learned was how to communicate better with this tough audience. There is no better way to learn how to talk to students than from students."

The Millennials are a big generation. Their impact will be felt on campus for some time. ■

*Millennials and the generational issues they bring to campus make a broad topic also explored in articles on GreentreeGazette.com.*



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