## Meet the Millennials

ard to believe but true — Millennials, those born after 1980, are growing up and having families. While they're not yet the primary demographic in the parenting cohort, 34 percent of today's 18- to 29-year-olds already have children, according to Pew Research Center for People and the Press. And the majority of those who haven't yet had kids plan to do so in the future.

Over the last year, we've noted the emergence of brands, media, and experiences designed to connect with the particular mindset of Millennial parents. The rate at which these changes are surfacing suggests that a marketplace shift is not only under way but also gaining momentum. This makes it critical that brands pay close attention to how the new moms and dads tackle this life stage, if they want to capture the Millennials as potential customers.

As anyone who's had Millennials on their radar recently can tell you—they're different.

Technology is normal, not novel. One defining characteristic of the Millennial generation is its relationship with technology. This generation grew up totally tech connected and not at all wowed by new developments — better, faster, cheaper are the norm.

Most critical for marketers is understanding that this generation not only feels differently about technology, they also use it differently than other generations. A recent study from the Pew Research Center, entitled Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next, confirms that 75 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds have profiles on a social networking website, thus making them the driving force behind the rise of these sites.

In spite of concerns that too much tech can be isolating, Millennials use technology as their primary means of connecting to a much greater extent than any other generation (including Gen Xers, who represent the majority of today's parents).

So it comes as no surprise that a new type of social-networking site is emerging — not just for Millennials themselves, but for their babies. The New

York Times recently noted the interest in sites that let users create online, interactive baby blogs that can be shared with friends and family.

With ready-made templates allowing parents to design and update personalized content easily, these do-it-yourself journals are replacing traditional baby books. They are also becoming one of this generation's must-have shower gifts and are available free from providers such as TotSpot, Kidmondo, Babyjellybeans, and Baby Blogs.

**Listening to new voices.** While the Millennial's propensity to use new technologies for traditional parenting tasks is reflective of the general transition to digital living, there are more fundamental shifts to consider as well—ones that affect the underlying experience of being a parent today.

For the generation that lives on Facebook, parenting is an increasingly public, not private, experience. The sense of isolation that plagued previous generations of mothers—and helped drive the women's movement of the 1960s and '70s—is being replaced with a 24/7 community bound by the desire for honestly shared experience.

This interest in community—and reality—is brought to razor-sharp focus by the recent explosion of mom blogs. The indispensable content aggregator, Alltop.com, contains links to hundreds of blogs and content sites in its "Moms" section. This is Alltop's single-largest topic, featuring perspectives from all manner of moms: single and married, working and stay-at-home, rural and urban, not to mention Korean moms, entrepreneurial moms, frugal moms, writing moms, and stylish moms. For any parent-focused marketer, it's also worth checking out the links in Alltop's "Dads" and "Parenting" sections for an even broader array of original voices.

While the majority of these blogs are written to resemble public diaries chronicling the trials, tribulations, and challenges of parenthood, some brand-centered blogs are emerging as well.

A few, such as the Graco blog are overtly corporate

## The impact of Millennials as parents is changing the marketplace.

sponsored. Others, such as Mom's Favorite Stuff, are supported by advertising but objective in their "real mom" recommendations. And, combining the old with the new, Johnson & Johnson's award-winning BabyCenter and ParentCenter sites have incorporated first-person chronicles into more traditionally structured magazine-like content with proven appeal.

**Unique generational identity.** Another characteristic parent-relevant brands can tap is the Millennial's sense of generational identity. Members of the Millennial generation view themselves - although not other generations—as part of a distinct tribe, and 61 percent say that their generation is unique, according to Pew.

Customization is a given. Millennials grew up expecting to have things their way—being able to express one's individuality is considered a fundamental right. These attitudes help explain why Pew's research found that more than 38 percent of 18to 29-year-olds have opted for tattoos, with 69 percent having at least two tattoos.

It also helps illuminate why this generation is significantly less likely than any other to have oldfashioned values on family and marriage. In fact, 60 percent of the generation overall, including 67 percent of females, completely disagree with the idea of women returning to traditional roles.

They are also obsessed with celebrities, and are the only generation to have grown up believing they would be both rich and famous. Note the rising popularity of the Celebrity Baby Blog (acquired by Time Warner's People.com in May 2008), Celebrity Baby Scoop, and Babyrazzi, as well as the mushrooming of product-focused baby articles written by celebs.

**Color them green.** As the first generation to have grown up celebrating Earth Day, the Millennial generation has a well-developed ecosensibility. No surprise then to note the number of green brands that have sprung up over the last year targeted to parents of small children.

- Seventh Generation is the first to market chlorine-free disposable diapers, with online ads encouraging moms to not just "change your baby. Change the planet."
- Retail giant Toys R Us introduced its own line of natural wooden toys and natural cotton plush animals on Earth Day. The packaging, identified by

- a green "R" seal with the words "Recycle, Renew, Reuse, Re-think," contains 70 percent recycled material.
- Consumer-culture observers from Iconoculture recently spotted an organic pacifier from the Danish company Natursutten. Made from pure Hevea brasiliensi rubber, it is 100 percent biodegradable.
- Taking a page out of the Netflix playbook, the BabyPlays Toy Rental program lets members rent more than 250 toys, adding a new dimension to the rent-versus-buy debate among young parents.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR TARGETING

Emerging and yet-to-be-invented brands have a unique opportunity in this changing marketplace. By mirroring the Millennial generation's perception of themselves as a distinct tribe, they can become the brands that this generation of parents owns.

Established family-centered brands will need to evolve their messaging, and possibly their core ideas as well, to remain relevant.

The sheer variety of highly targeted content offers any brand nearly limitless ways to connect with Millennial parents. Grassroots campaigns, traditional web advertising, and branded content specific to this audience are all routes worth exploring.

Successful marketers need to recognize that although this generation is entering a predictable life stage, they want to be treated as individuals. Their identity will not be erased by becoming moms and dads.

The key to branding success will be reaching Millennial parents where and how they live, and speaking to them in a voice that honestly and accurately reflects their unique perspectives, attitudes, and experiences.



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