

The generation forcing brands to reimagine their customer journeys

By [George Bourdos](#)

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Gone are the days where brands can offer customers the same products or services they have been selling for years, no matter how successful these products and services may be. It is no longer good enough to have just a prime location as a fashion retailer or have that great signature dish as a restaurant brand.



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The consumer is changing... no scratch that out... the consumer has already changed and will continue to evolve at an accelerated rate that brands have never before experienced with the generations of the past. Who is this consumer that has taken the market by storm? This techno savvy, attention seeking, know-it-all generation that is known as the millennials.

Aged 23-34 (born 1983-1994), this generation grew up alongside (and you could even say they are siblings) some of today's biggest innovations and technologies that their parents could only have dreamed of.

They grew up with the first cellular telephones - the bulky devices become smaller as they grew up. As they matured into adults these phones grew smarter, they got cameras, they connected to the internet, evolving into the smartphones we know and depend on today.

This is the generation that saw the birth of the world wide web and dial up internet. Then the world-changing tech become high speed fibre and Wi-Fi that we know and depend on almost as much as we do the air we breathe.

They say that Generation Z (the younger or next generation aged 17-22) are the “true digital natives”; then millennials have to be considered the “true digital adopters”. Adopters may even be an understatement because the research shows that millennials are so dependent, not only on their mobile devices, but to the social and online access they give them. Without them they feel lost and helpless and in some cases even anxious or depressed.

But what does this mean for brands and what makes these consumers so different from the ones who came before them?

Experience-driven

The biggest difference is that they are experience driven monsters, constantly searching and seeking new and unique experiences. The core product or service is still extremely important to them and still has to be a quality offering, but they expect brands to deliver these in new and exciting ways. They want what I like to call “share worthy experiences”.

Remember those mobile devices that they consider extensions of themselves? They are demanding that brands offer them experiences worth texting, tweeting, instagraming or blogging about.

Although this sounds simple enough, this generation is not so easily fooled. Authenticity and relevance are key in winning over this generation. As much as they want the flash of exciting new experiences, they are searching for brands that resonant with their personal style and beliefs, as well as brands that stand for something.

Seventy percent of millennials would rather buy from a brand that supports a cause... but then again it is more than just acting like you care... brands need to prove that they care.

Not only about giving back to their communities or the environment, but also proving that they care about each individual customer. Millennials demand personalisation and customisation - whether it be their name on their Starbucks coffee mug or the custom made-to-order burger at the local burger joint.

Just as they will love and praise you online for giving them unique and memorable experiences, they will also be just as quick to destroy you if you fail to deliver on your promises. Every day we see negative brand publicity go viral via social media, showing just how powerful the consumer of today can be if you dare cross them.

On the other hand they also have the power to elevate your brand to new levels, if you can succeed in delivering what they want.

Rethinking product strategy

Brands like Moleskin have had to rethink their product strategy; yes they still sell millions of notebooks each year, but more and more people are turning to digital note making devices, thus leading them to launch their smart writing pen and notebook that allows customers to keep both hard and soft copies of their notes.

Not only did they re-evaluate their product offering, but also looked at what other way they could make the customer experience better and offer more than just great notebooks. They realised that their notebooks are taken to thousands of meetings each day around the world and one of the most popular meeting spots, apart from the office, are coffee shops. So in 2016 they launched the first ever Moleskin Café in Milan, Spain.

Moleskin, like many leading overseas brands such as Nike, have gone back to drawing board and have had to reinvent their entire customer journey from start to finish. They, like many other brands, have realised that the millennial generation expects nothing less.

Nike's latest flagship store in downtown Manhattan is testament to this. From the second you walk through the door you can see this - the next level of customer journey mapping. From free Wi-Fi on entry, to staff that offer service second only to 5 star hotels, as well as product knowledge the likes of which I have never experienced: not just the opportunity to try on Nike's latest footwear, but the chance to actually test-drive the shoes in store on treadmills allowing customers to do virtual runs through Central Park and in store indoor-soccer and basketball courts with dedicated coaches to really test out the brand's latest gear.

Customisation

But the journey doesn't end there, they [Nike] allow you to customise your merchandise with your own name and colours. Checkout is made simple by each staff member having their own handheld point of sale device; and if the store doesn't have your size, simply order it online from their other stores and get it delivered to your door (even if that door happens to be a hotel door).

So to truly be a brand that can win loyalty amongst the millennial generation, brands need to engage in deep dialog with their customers to understand their wants and needs. They need to reimagine their costumer experiences from the customer's point of view. Offering seamless on and offline experiences, that merge the best of both worlds into one truly unique experience. The brands that are willing to stray from the same old same old and really engage this new audience, will ensure that they endure through both the millennial generation, as well as Gen Z to follow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bourdos is a true Millennial, who holds a Bachelor of Commerce Degree in Entrepreneurship from the University of Pretoria. George has been a partner in VBN Consultants for the past four years and heads up the Future Business Division.

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