

Are You Set Up for Millennial Success?

A part of the Millennial Success Series by Millennial Associates
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Business and community leaders are seeing the fact that the face of marketing and outreach is changing. Models that once dictated how businesses and organizations communicate and market to their target audience have started to deteriorate and become ineffective. Why has this happened?

It's all about conversation

Our ways of communication in our society are shifting. Due to communication tools such as the Internet, email, mobile phones, text messaging and others, we are seeing a large amount of data and conversation occurring where none used to be. Over the last five years, the ways that consumers, households and individuals communicate have been altered by technologies and tools that allow for anyone to now participate in a global conversation – something which has affected the ways businesses and organizations have traditionally marketed or reached out toward their target audiences.

While little data exists to show this trend yet because of the sudden shift in communication styles and methods, observations are showing that success in marketing for companies and organizations is realized more through a conversation and relationship with audiences than the traditional top-down, lecturing style of advertising. Simply put, organizations are successful if they hold a conversation with their audiences rather than advertise to them. This is not to say that companies and organizations have always wanted to “lecture” to their people, but mostly due to the limitations of advertising over the last many decades we saw that model arise. With modern emerging technologies, we are seeing individuals become empowered to craft their own message, to discuss their own decisions, and have the world to listen.

Specifically, emerging social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Myspace and others have equipped individuals with the resources to hold conversations within their realm of social influence more efficiently than ever. Individuals are gaining influence over others, information is readily available about any product or service at a moment's notice. Businesses and organizations are scrambling to join in this global discussion and find ways to develop a message that will be receivable by their target audiences. Because of this individual empowerment, we're seeing a move from one-way marketing conversations (e.g. traditional advertisements) to two-way communications between the individual and the organization.

Businesses and organizations have already been meeting with success in responding to these changes in our society. All over the United States and the world we see successful social campaigns that identify the parts of successful social messages and leverage those parts to deliver a genuine, meaningful message to target audiences. Marketing departments and

traditional marketing firms need to respond quickly to these rapidly-changing dynamics if they are to remain successful in their message development strategies.

Comprehensive marketing approaches are necessary today. Using all available tools to them, companies and organizations can strategize and create new ways to have their message delivered in a world where independent participants are beginning to hold the keys. In other words, we search for ways to have messages work on their own, to be carried word-of-mouth and go viral as a message that genuinely helps the target audience – not just an advertisement.

While much research needs to be done in this area of new communication and the Internet, the Millennial Associates team has identified four realities that exist now today that are essential for any modern communications campaign. The Internet was designed years ago to be a collaborative effort. Today, it has achieved that goal, with millions of users creating millions of messages that have the ability to develop communities in ways never before seen.

THE FOUR REALITIES OF MARKETING IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM:

Reality 1: Customized websites with fresh content are essential

Any organization or business that is looking to increase exposure and get their message out there, the simplest way to do this is through the creation or improvement of a website. Complete with custom information on the organization or company, it's the first step to getting your message out to the web's citizens.

With more and more households in America using the web on a daily basis, it makes smart business sense to get a custom website. Fresh, accurate content on a website is the first opportunity an organization or company has to impress or establish a relationship with many potential visitors. Unfortunately, many small or local businesses and organizations are priced out of the market of custom web projects or don't know where to start. If they get on the web at all, they're forced to select template websites that compromises their credibility and image. Moreover, keeping content fresh and accurate has always been a difficulty since once web projects are complete, those responsible for maintenance must have web coding knowledge for successful updates.

This is not so anymore. Current trends in web design today allow for completely custom websites at more affordable prices for small and local businesses and organizations. Companies such as Millennial Associates also offer additions in their web projects to allow for in-house updating and content generation of websites to keep content fresh without knowing any web code and without having to call a web guru. This display of flexibility shows your visitors that you're committed to innovative ideas and changing for the better, a business trait that is undeniably valuable in today's economy.

Custom websites speak more than words to potential customers, clients, donors, or members. They say that the customer's needs are a priority by avoiding template design that doesn't account for visitors' individual interests. They say that the organization or company cares enough to look professional and respond to changes in business trends and remain flexible. Websites speak wonders for an organization or company. After all, it's now the first line of research for people; the Internet is the new phone book. Instead of a small, impersonal advertisement, however, businesses and organizations have the chance to give their visitors information they want to see.

Reality 2: Advertising is no longer a one-way line of communication

We're used to being advertised to: on the TV, on the radio, in the newspaper, in magazines. Everywhere you look, we are being told what to buy without really having any ability to participate in the process other than making the purchase, and then the relationship is over. The Internet and other tools have emerged in recent years, encouraging a leveling of the communication structure. No longer do people have to be dictated to – they know that they can tune out ads and only participate in discussions that they're interested in. People can discuss products among their friends with great ease more than ever through email, social media, and mobile technology. There is huge potential for reaching out to people today, however, old methods of marketing simply won't work if people can just tune it out.

Just look on the Internet today to see examples of the two-way communication. People from around the world are discussing products and services, and organizations and companies are scrambling to become a part of the conversation. Companies and organizations today must develop messages that are well-received by their people. If not, the message will be simply lost in the flood of other advertisements. The most successful will actually be social in nature, being carried naturally along person to person with the organization or company being as actively involved in the conversation as possible. These new tools allow us to see word-of-mouth marketing be more powerful than ever.

To be successful, companies and organizations need to develop effective messages that have the potential to be carried from person to person using the Internet, email, and social media tools. As these resources have only started to become prominent in everyday life, acting now to become social in your marketing efforts helps your success in the future by following this undeniable marketing trend.

Reality 3: People want to be noticed and feel needed

This has always been the case, but is more evident now than ever with the Internet empowering the average individual and giving him or her an equal voice. People want to feel like their decisions matter, and because of the ability to research companies, products and services at the click of a button, people are bound to decide on companies that offer true service and relationship over those that simply offer one-sided communication.

The Friend Model by Millennial Associates illustrates this well. Simply put, it's the assumption that an idea or message will not succeed in social media channels if it is not friendly and oriented toward the betterment of others. In other words, you cannot be selfish.

Messages are more apt to go viral and be carried word-of-mouth if they are not an overt attempt to market or advertise to an individual or group. **You must be true, genuine friends of those who participate for them to see you as the same and thus carrying your message further.** Fake "friends" or those who are deemed to be simply advertising are not successful. The Internet is full of ads – the only way to combat this is to avoid "advertising" altogether and create a conversation around message, programs and ideas. Friends tell friends about these things, creating the network effects.

Social media offers the opportunity to connect with friends. Participants do not wish to be advertised to or have ideas promoted to them. If a message is interpreted as such, it will be passed over just as thousands of popup and banner ads are ignored.

More than ever, people want to know their purchases are the best. When given an option between one or another, they would most likely choose the company or organization that is interested in them and is actively seeking to improve their product or service based on that person's needs. Tools today provide the opportunity to businesses and organizations that want to truly engage their people and serve them.

Reality 4: New outreach and marketing methods are not difficult or strange

In fact, we've known how to be successful in marketing since we were kids. Tools like websites, social media, and traditional marketing are most effective when following the golden rule and taking a genuine interest in a person's well being. It's easier to talk to a person about a service, favor, or product if they are your friend. It hasn't always been this way. Up until the last five years, communication was traditionally one-sided, encouraging unidirectional advertising to be dominant and occupy the majority of marketing textbooks.

The Internet has empowered people to participate in their economic decisions. Companies and organizations that fail to realize this will find their people going to alternatives that practice it. People simply want to be treated like we want to be treated. By following the golden rule, businesses and organizations can increase value in their relationships with people.