

Providing a good experience and an incentive to share it with friends has grown overnight into **a multibillion-dollar social commerce business**—created and driven by millennials.



Are Millennials Eating Your Lunch?

Six ways to build millennials' trust

BY RODNEY MASON, CMO, MOOSYLVANIA

The millennial generation is changing the way companies are marketing themselves, due to millennials' significant population and the profound changes in how they conduct their daily lives compared to any generation before. Your goal is to build their trust in your business.

Millennials are the largest generation in U.S. history at more than 50 million, and they identify technology as the differentiator between themselves and other generations.

The Pew Research Center conducted a national study of adult millennials (over 18 years old) and found that they are:

► **Untrusting.** Only 30% believe most people can be trusted.

► **Tech-Savvy.** Ninety percent use the Internet, vs. 79% of baby boomers.

Seventy-five percent have a social-network profile, compared with 50% of Gen X and 30% of boomers. Fifty-five percent of millennial social-site users visit social sites daily, 20% every few days and 25% once a week.

► **Mobile Oriented.** Eighty-eight percent text, 64% text while driving. The median number of texts in a day? Twenty. Sixty-two percent connect to the Internet wirelessly using a laptop or hand-held

when away from home or work. Forty-one percent of millennials have a cellphone and no landline.

► **Diverse.** They are the most culturally diverse of any generation: 61% Caucasian, 19% Latino, 13% African-American and 4% other. Boomers by contrast are 73% Caucasian.

► **Hardest Hit by Unemployment.** Forty-one percent work full time, down from 50% in 2006.

Because millennials are tech-savvy and mobile-oriented, social networking online or through mobile devices is an excellent way to engage them and get

their business.

How do you use these tools to earn their trust when they are so untrusting? In our work engaging with millennials, we've found six ways to quickly do just that.

1 Enhance Their Community

You will be considered more relevant when you occupy a natural place within the millennial lifestyle. Showing them that you're listening, responding and providing a platform for dialogue is a good start that carries a lot of weight.

A Twitter feed or Facebook page can serve as this platform. Both will show up when your business category is searched on Google, thereby improving your natural search listing, which is important for this generation.

Monitoring your reputation on review and rating websites, and publicly addressing negative comments and issues, also builds instant credibility. Keep in mind, because millennials are heavy users of the mobile Web, they regularly review and comment on businesses they like and don't like in real time (and in proximity) to decide if they want to visit or to let others know what they think. That's why Facebook, Twitter, rating sites and other places that translate well to mobile should be a top priority. A mobile-oriented website is also nice to have, but social sites are a quicker fix.

A good example of a food retailer enhancing its online community value was Burger King's "Whopper Sacrifice." It called for people to "unfriend" 10 of their followers on Facebook to get a free Whopper. Many used the campaign to play a joke on friends. They unfriended and then refriended the same friends to get the coupon and have a laugh. The event added value to the millennial life-

style and resulted in millions of Whopper-coupon redemptions.

2 Personalization

Millennials demand customization in everything they do. Let them customize their experience with your product and they will be more inclined to share the experience with their peers. Sauces, mix-ins, custom ingredient options and combos are all effective ways to personalize your food offerings.

3 Acknowledge Life Events

Right now, millennials are emotionally invested in some of life's biggest milestones—college, first jobs, first apartments or homes, first new car, marriage, children. So they gravitate toward messages (in the form of special offers and advertising) that recognize these transitional periods.

An example opportunity is to promote your business in welcome packs, kits and websites for new homeowners, parents or college enrollees. Being a part of that life-changing experience can establish emotional connections that create longer-term loyalty.

4 Incent Sharing

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You don't have to promote an offer on Groupon or other social sites at a loss to get millennial traffic. Instead, promote offers via e-mail, text, your company website, Twitter or Facebook that have a "forward" hook: "Forward this offer to two friends and save \$2 for yourself." This

method can not only expand the reach of your offer but also improve the redemption rate because it's forwarded from a trusted peer. It's no stretch for them to share and recruit; they do it regularly.

5 Unconventional Messaging

Find surprising locations or unusual methods to connect with millennials. They are endeared by the unconventional and like to share it with their peers.

Kogi Korean BBQ food trucks in Los Angeles announce where they will appear on Twitter, and they have a line of customers waiting when they arrive. They began with one truck and a few followers on Twitter. Now they have multiple trucks, regular press coverage and more than 86,000 avid followers.

6 Support the Cause

Make supporting a cause effortless and provide the tools to share the message. Consider sponsoring a local organization with a portion of proceeds earned on a specific day benefiting the charity.

Work with the organization to promote the event to constituents, who will try your product to benefit the cause. If they have a good experience with your product, they will become endeared to it because of the social-cause bond you created. Chick-fil-A has built significant trial and loyalty with millennial moms by using this approach to benefit elementary schools.

Building trust with millennials doesn't require you to use every trick in the book. The key is to consistently make an effort toward dialogue, and engage beyond the act of the transaction.

Rodney Mason is CMO of Moosylvania and an expert on millennials and digital and social media for retail. ■