

OIA breakfast offers insights on Millennial consumers

Young buyers trust anonymous reviews and seek out the lowest prices — but they also care about message and quality

→IT WAS DÉJÀ VU all over again. A decade ago, the Industry Breakfast addressed a need to connect with Gen Xers — now the target is Millennials. Those under-30s represent a new breed and as with any strange animal, a cautious approach is prudent. The key theme at this year's event was authenticity since an under-informed sell risks alienating potential customers.

OIA commissioned Michael Wood and his TRU research team to investigate young people's attitudes toward and engagement with outdoor brands to help manufacturers and retailers better understand their future consumers. TRU, which specializes in research on tweens, teens and 20-somethings, set up a qualitative study of 20-28-year-olds from Boston, Atlanta, Chicago and Salt Lake City. They completed assignments over a three-week period that involved pictures and videos to help define what's important to them when it comes to gear, apparel and accessories.

The breakfast introduced buyers, retailers and media to the Salt Lake focus group — young adults with interests from beach volleyball to big game hunting.

ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Millennials trust one another over the marketing machine. They want to know what their friends and friends of friends think about a product. They'll go out of their way to confirm or deny what they learn on television, through ads or in a store by endlessly surfing the web for reviews. They're looking for expert advice and word of mouth. They often notice someone with a greater level of experience in their sport of interest and ask them about their gear.

"IT'S COOL WHEN I SEE SOMEONE IN A JACKET WHO DOESN'T SKI"

— MATT, A MILLENNIAL PANELIST

They don't see it as tedious. To them, it's enjoyable; it builds confidence in their purchasing decisions. "I want what I buy to be the best," said panelist Josh. "Finding a quality product is worth my time and research." These Millennials said they're willing to spend a little more to get something that delivers on its promises. And they will purchase it wherever they get the best deal, whether online or at a brick-and-mortar store.



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1. Panelist Tala Mobley discusses Millennial buying habits. 2. OIA President Frank Hugelmeyer welcomes breakfasters.

After price comes convenience, customer service, technical expertise, retail experts and a shared interest in the community. Millennials want to align themselves with retailers who are part of a community. They want to support the little guy and local businesses. Companies would be well-served to find brand ambassadors who not only look good, but who also have the ability to communicate at a grassroots level.

THE AND GENERATION

Perhaps it's an extension of the "me" generation, but Millennials want it all. They expect both style and substance in what they buy. "It's a two-for-one thing," said panelist Lyndsey. "With our economy there's not a lot of money to spend on items, so we're looking for something we can use on the hill then come down and go out to dinner in."

The thinking is that if you get two uses from the same product, you're getting your money's worth. Young people always have been interested in what looks cool, but now they're willing to spend a little more to ensure it functions well. They believe their parents buy "what's good enough." This generation doesn't want to settle.

WHAT'S IN A BRAND

No young person is immune to peer pressure. They tend to want what their friends have, but also seek items with an authentic, intelligent message behind them. "I feel like I have friends that will fit in with my attitude when I see them wearing brands I like," said panelist Leslie. These



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brands tend to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

"Brands are important because they say exactly who you are and who you would like to be," said another panelist. Millennials believe in brands and logos. They go so far as to say that logos offer the chance to connect with like-minded peers.

Woods calls it "Centergy" when the middle ground expands and crossover gear is accepted. Before, you were a poseur if you sported a ski jacket but didn't ski. Today, participation is not a prerequisite. Millennials see stuff as a way to bring people into the sport. "It's cool when I see someone in a jacket who doesn't ski. I get excited because I think maybe some day you'll find the passion I have," said panelist Matt.

The bottom line? Deliver on promises. Young people have the tools to poke holes in your story. Align yourself with your message and embrace social media if you want to serve the new Millennium.

OIA will send out a comprehensive report on TRU's findings after the show.

--JILL ADLER