Millennials vs. Baby Boomers

Optimizing Technology for Maximum Audience Impact

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Executive Summary

Understanding the motivations that drive the two dominant demographic groups and how they interact with technology greatly impacts the success of any business. Optimizing the message and its format for the target audience is the best way to capture attention. Baby Boomers tend to stick with what they know and may be hesitant to jump on the latest technology trends. Millennials are more web-savvy and are more receptive to trying new technologies. To succeed in today's digital economy, businesses must cross this divide and adopt practices that maximize the impact of their message and implement technologies that cater to the very different lifestyles of each demographic.

The *How* and the *Where* of It

When Baby Boomers did grade school homework they had to show their work. Go to the library. Do the research. Prove the math. Draw conclusions. Write it up. They had to know *how* they got the answer. When Millennials did grade school homework they merely had to know *where to find* the answer. And the faster the better. Launch an app from anywhere. Search the web with a few taps and clicks. Google it. Cut and paste. Download now. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Millennials are merely taking advantage of the assets today's technology provides. But these behaviors are rooted in greater social paradigms that continue to impact how these very different generations interact with each other and technology. In order for any business to maximize the impact of its message, they should clearly understand the key motivations and core values of each group and tailor their message accordingly.

A Clash of Values

Baby Boomers Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) – the generation responsible for *building* the technologies and network infrastructure that gave us the Information Age – are older and more methodical[3,7]. Raised on newspapers, magazines, direct mail and brick and mortar shopping, Boomers are more apt to trust the printed word. They prefer tangible media and desire direct human interaction. Most need to see and feel a product before buying, although a growing percentage is becoming more comfortable with online purchasing[1].

When doing so, Baby Boomers – especially older ones – tend to use desktop computers with a large monitor, keyboard and mouse so they can more easily navigate web searches. They research and read pages at length, getting immersed in product details or service choices before making a decision. Their smart phones are used mostly, well, for talking (and taking pictures). Older Boomers are more likely to call support numbers during an online purchase for assistance with completing a transaction. They are using web browsers like Explorer, Chrome, Safari and Firefox and search engines like Google and Bing to find what they need. Boomer usage is also growing on social media sites, primarily Facebook and LinkedIn.

Millennials Millennials (those born between 1980 and 1996, and younger Gen Xers born between 1965 and 1979) – the generation responsible for *using and improving* upon existing technologies – are younger, more technology focused and quicker to act[3,7]. Instant gratification is the buzzword here as Millennials, raised on wireless technology and next-day delivery, easily navigate the web on their mobile devices with the speed of an airline ticketing agent. It's all about the thumbs. Preferring texting to talking, technology is second nature to Millennials and their smartphone, tablet or laptop is more of an extension of their hands (and rarely out of them) with the whole of human knowledge at their fingertips. Millennials are quicker to use iOS or Android apps and go directly to known websites to find the object of their desire[4]. Untethered from the printed word, they leverage social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat to gather information, share opinions, and judge a product's merits with remote peers[1,5].

INTERNET

SOCIAL MEDIA

Managing the Digital Divide

Never before has the contrast of two generations been so stark. This point in time – the advent and maturation of the Internet and social media – has put a digital time stamp on our culture, in effect dividing us into *Befores* and *Afters*. Baby Boomers watch the news and their favorite TV shows on the broadcast network's schedule. Millennials get their news from on-demand streaming videos, blogs and podcasts, and watch their favorite TV shows on *their* schedules via DVR, Netflix and AppleTV. Baby Boomers value personal relationships, face-to-face meetings and recommendations from trusted sources. Millennials rely more on texting, utilize crowdsourcing and online reviews: How many stars did it get on Yelp?

American Baby Boomers, a very homogenous group, are extremely competitive and *me*-focused; raised to believe only the winners get trophies. Millennials, the most ethnically diverse generation ever, are more open to self-expression and are interested in achieving results for the greater social good. Baby Boomers are drawn to proven, reliable products and services that will improve their daily lifestyle and/or preserve their youth. Millennials are seeking the next great adventure, uniqueness, and the ability to answer the question of the moment *in* the moment. As such, Millennials require faster Internet service as they typically work or socialize with music playing and/or videos streaming while running multiple applications simultaneously. Boomers tend to operate one application at a time. Baby Boomers are more brand loyal, Millennials not so much; they go wherever the best deal can be found[6]. But they don't have the buying power of the Baby Boomer generation – yet.

So, what's a business to do? How do you target your message to one group without alienating the other? How should your business transition to adapt to the needs of Millennial customers – now the largest and fastest growing demographic group in the country[4,7]? What if your audience includes both?

Maximize Your Message

Leverage technology to achieve success with each demographic group.

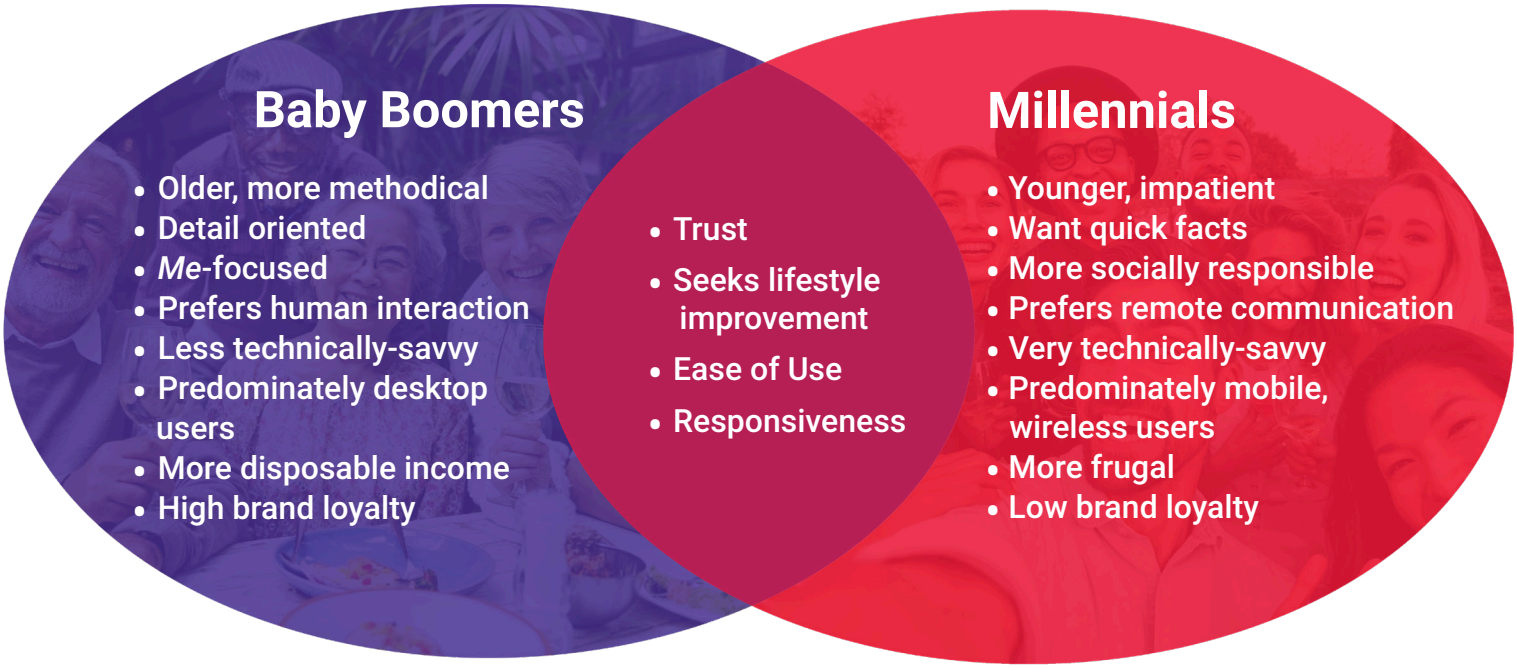
1. Analyze the age range of your primary target audience. Are they Boomers or Millennials?
2. Craft a message that relates to their core values.
3. Deliver that message in a format that matches their technology skills.

In other words, which generation is dominating revenue generation[2]?

Generational Preferences[5]	Boomers	Millennials
Marketing	• Email • Articles • Direct Mail	• Social Media • YouTube Videos • Push Notifications
Customer Service	• Phone • Be thorough – patience! • Value their time	• Live Chat • Answer quickly • Self service
Technology	• Desktop • One application at a time • Less security focused	• Mobile • Multiple apps open simultaneously • Very security focused

Businesses targeting Baby Boomers for their products and services should focus on their core values of health, wellness, family and children. Explain "what's in it for me?" fully and using simple language[2]; minimize the technobabble. Don't worry as much about length of descriptions for products or services, Baby Boomers like details. And pictures. Remember, they'll be surfing the Internet from desktop PCs so they will get the full web browser experience. Make the site easy to navigate and build in easy access to support such as 800 numbers for personal assistance. Use lots of keywords to identify your product or service. Baby Boomers conduct lots of web searches and visit the top ranked sites.

Businesses targeting Millennials should get right to the point. These web surfers have no patience for long explanations or delayed responses. If they can't find the answer in the first few sentences they move on[1,2,5]. Play to Millennials' time-pressured lifestyles with direct, hard-hitting copy formatted in short bullets. Better yet, deliver information in video snippets; Millennials prefer passive learning. Tie in your product or service to a greater social movement. Millennials – many feel isolated by the very technologies that allow remote communications (texting, email, online education, etc.) – like to feel connected to a community beyond themselves and are more willing to purchase from businesses that allow them to contribute to a cause or effect social change[2,4]. Millennials use mobile devices for the majority of their Internet access, so businesses targeting them should optimize their site or develop an app for viewing on mobile devices and wearables (iWatches, Google Glasses) with smaller screens. Make product ratings and customer recommendations easy to spot, and make sure the site is tied into the Big 4 social media entities (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram) to circulate the brand among Millennials[5]. If your business is a retail establishment or restaurant where customers linger, Wi-Fi service is a must to attract Millennials.



In the real world it is the rare enterprise that exclusively targets one generation or the other; with exceptions being lifecycle markets such as infant/baby care and nursing home or funeral services. And even those will shift from Boomers to Millennials as the population ages. Balance is the key to success. Most businesses serve a mix and must embrace both demographic groups to be successful. For businesses with one foot in each world it may even pay to versionize their digital platforms to best appeal to each group, for ignoring one in lieu of the other only hurts a business in the long run[1,2,4,6].

Are you ready to put the power of ultra-fast Internet, data and hosted voice solutions to work for your business? Contact us today to learn more about how **RCN Business Services** can help improve your security and drive your business productivity to new heights.

Sources & Acknowledgements

While this white paper draws from published sources on research into the mindset of Boomers and Millennials, some statements are generalizations and conclusions drawn from life experiences. Clearly, not all Baby Boomers are techno-phobic and not all Millennials require instant gratification. However, the general points made in this document hold true with regard to the attitudes and conceptions of these diverse demographic groups. The information referenced herein has been synthesized from the following sources:

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6. *What's the Difference Between Millennial and Baby Boomer Shoppers?* Posted by Inc.com 9/25/17. https://www.inc.com/peter-roesler/whats-difference-between-millennial-baby-boomer-shoppers.html
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