

Marketing to Millennials

How Will Marketers Reach Generation Y?

BY BARRY C. COLLIN

The behaviors of Millennials are so substantively different from those of older generations that healthcare marketers need to establish a better understanding of this group and begin planning specific tactics that will engage them. A failure to act quickly may lead to Generation Y becoming the most difficult of all generations to engage and treat

Just when you thought you've heard everything about how "Millennials" (also called Gen Y) are unique and will change the world, as a DTC professional you must now consider the group's impact on our industry. Clearly, Millennials represent both present and the future adult prescription pharmaceutical consumers, and therefore must immediately become a major point of focus for *all* manufacturers.

As a result of their upbringing, the media, technology and myriad other factors, Millennials' overall consumer and personal behaviors are substantively different from those of previous generations. In fact, they are so different that you must quickly develop a better understanding of them and expect to take specific action immediately. If we do not act now, we may find these young people to be the most difficult of all generations to engage and treat, resulting in disastrous health and business outcomes.

For our discussion here, we will discuss teen- and college-aged Millennials (born 1995 or thereafter). The unique behaviors of the Millennials manifest in the way they accept and engage products, seek and find information, react to authority figures, and view time.

In essence Millennials shatter the traditional "prescribe-enforce-consume" model. For as long as there has been a pharmaceutical industry as we know it, doctors have prescribed medications for children, parents enforced the prescribed medications' consumption, and young people consumed what was prescribed. That model is now obsolete.

What will affect DTC marketing?

Let's look at some of the new behaviors that drastically affect DTC with our Millennial consumer generation:

They expect to understand "why" and "how." Today's young people are far less likely to accept the direction "do this"



without knowing "how" and "why." Doctors' prescriptions and parental enforcement are far less likely to be followed without the young person being both involved and knowledgeable. This stems less from traditional rebelliousness than from Millennials being raised in an instantaneous Internet-based information-on-demand world. Anyone who has had a three year-old child will be reminded of the incessant,

non-stop "why?" question. While that repeated inquiry can be unnerving its motivation is curiosity. Millennials want to hear more than just "this pill will address your symptom, take it twice a day."

With a quest to be informed comes a quest for empowerment. Millennials want to be part of the decision making processes that affect their lives. They aren't looking to decline, they simply want to be in the loop.

Relative time perception. While the "why and how" issue is a result of the expectation to be able to find out information on most anything, relative time perception results from growing up with non-linear, self-directed entertainment such as console video games, pocket/handheld games, mobile phone-based texting, instant messaging, and so on.

Young people have developed a flexible sense of time. And I don't mean just trying to get them out of bed in the morning for school. Along with multi-tasking, all this instantaneous action creates a bifurcation between "real world regulated" time (reported by your watch) and variable high-speed digital time, such as engaging in video games. Conversations on the phone are much too slow and e-mail is ridiculous to them. Unfortunately, along with this development of relative time perception, young people eschew watches. The timepieces' linear time presentation is not compatible with their high-speed lives, and they grow bored if not constantly stimulated.

As such, time moves much too quickly to be tied to an "every two hours" ritual. Such real world regulated habitual

behaviors literally fly in the face of how Millennials live, interact, and function. While Einstein would be proud of their natural use of the relativity of time, it makes for a severe challenge for parents, physicians, and the pharmaceutical industry to build safe pharmaceutical consumption practices.

Let's quickly view some of the other challenges the DTC community faces in engaging the Millennial generation:

- **Distractions.** Millennials have more distractions than any previous generation, primarily due to disruptive technologies. Developing real world regulated time-based routines become that much harder.
- **Multi-tasking.** Millennials are serious multi-taskers, but unlike much of the hype you may have heard, they do each simultaneously engaged activity at diminished capacity or involvement. Capturing attention is that much more challenging.
- **Advertising saturated = Advertising numb.** Young people have been overwhelmed by consumer advertisers who treasure their demographic for its fairly recession-proof discretionary income. So Millennials will ignore most advertising. When something of interest does pique their interest, they will research it (frequently in real time while listening to the ad).
- **Relatable.** Advertisers and the media have so completely catered to this generation that Millennials fully expect advertising, media and information to be placed in a rapid-fire, time-relative, relatable package created for them specifically.
- **Drug abuse deterrence saturation.** Today when Millennials do search for information on medications for young people, what they encounter primarily is information on young people abusing illegal and OTC drugs. There is a world of "say no to drugs" information on the Web, but where are they to find the information they need for proper prescriptions?

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Along with these behaviors peculiar to the Millennials, young people today are faced with other issues no different today than for those a hundred years ago:

- **Invincibility.** All healthy young people perceive themselves as relatively invincible.
- **Peer pressure.** Deleterious behaviors relating to prescribed medications, ranging from "you don't need that" to "what if you took *three*?" emerge from other youths.
- **Procrastination.** Teens and college students remain some of the greatest procrastinators. The danger here is doubling up for dosages missed, despite warning labels.

- **Competing priorities.** There are simply too many things to do other than consider medication.
- **Demonstrates vulnerability.** In the amazingly high-pressure world young people face, showing a weakness may be a hard sell.

Building safe and positive perspectives and consumption practices in young people has never been easy. The Millennials however introduce challenges that not only affect them from a marketing perspective, but more importantly from a health perspective.

Finding the effective solution

Fortunately there is a solution that we as an industry can implement relatively easily and inexpensively.

All of the unique challenges Millennials bring can be addressed through the unique presentation of **information** by the pharmaceutical industry. The seven key elements of this presentation are:

1. Provides both broad and specific information that allows young people to better understand *what* prescription medications do, *how* they work, and *why* they are important.
2. Empowers young people by helping them understand their physiological systems now and as they mature.
3. Facilitates the formulation of smart questions for their physicians.
4. Gently instill and motivate proper prescription medication behaviors now that will develop into healthy adult behaviors.
5. Provides a safe harbor for overall information and guidance, as well as clearly separated sections for specific product *information* (vs. marketing).
6. A central location that young people can find on their own or can be offered as a URL by doctors and parents. Millennials are superb at discovery and learning on their own if information is presented in manner in which they can *relate*.
7. Is safe, secure, private, and non-invasive.

Together, a program that provides these seven facets would serve young people, parents, and physicians and build the foundation for an understanding relationship with the pharmaceutical industry stronger than *any* generation prior.

Clearly, the best way to present this unique presentation program would be via a ubiquitous tool that is absolutely integral to the Millennial's psyche and lifestyle – the Web. A unique Web site developed by participating pharmaceutical companies, providing the elements above as an easily found, easily used, invaluable and targeted information resource accessible 24x7.

The information on such a Web site should cover a wide range of information important to Millennials. For example, a drug specific issue like "how does isotretinoin help my acne?" can be contributed by firms supplying that product. Likewise,

causes of great interest to young people can be addressed: “how does my new albuterol inhaler without CFCs help protect the environment?” Overall issues such as “why can’t I double up for missed dosages?” should be addressed as well. Brand-specific information should be provided via clearly-indicated company areas on the site.

A precursor program demonstrating the value of such a program was deployed in 2006. An educational course for schools, “Medicines in My Home (MIMH),” was developed to teach students in the sixth through eighth grades about the safe use of OTC medicines. MIMH was launched by the FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) in cooperation with the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland and the National Council on Patient Information and Education. The course helps young children understand OTC medications in their home, dangers, identification, and handling.

MIMH, designed for much younger children, is an excellent first step. But children at that age are generally not yet empowered (nor generally interested) in their own physical care. Nor would they be viewed as a likely audience for DTC marketing efforts by the pharmaceutical industry.

For young people older than 13, a media-rich Web site as discussed would be perhaps the single most powerful tool for creating informed consumers for today and the future. An informal inquiry to the FDA about such an industry developed and deployed Web site as I present here was received most positively.

Creating such a Web site will require unique specific features and look-and-feel. Some of the features and caveats would include:

- The Web site must first and foremost secure young people’s trust – and **never** violate that trust. (Otherwise we will create a generation that distrusts the pharmaceutical industry from the onset).
- The Web site must **empower** through **self direction** – by demonstrating how young people can control their lives and health through proper usage. By empowering Millennials within the rules of safety and well-being, they can take charge of their health and more easily accept guidance from doctors and guardians.
- Information must be provided in a manner that is completely relatable to them. As a specialist in youth consumer behaviors, I guarantee that a site not properly geared to the specifics of today’s young people will fail.
- Sponsors are OK, but young people would ignore and be put off by ads, which I do not recommend here.
- The Web site must have low-cost videos hosted by positive adult figures as well as young people that are dynamic and cool but not condescending, aggressive or preachy. Millennials are much more connected to videos than to reading extensive text.
- The Web site should have mobile access (Millennials are huge users of mobile Web).

- The Web site should test and require users to be 13 or above to avoid Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) issues (see www.ftc.gov/coppa/).
- An overview of medicinal cautions should be included, but the overall emphasis must be positive towards developing proper prescription medicine consumption practices throughout their lives.
- Manufacturers should be able to access, create and control their own content in sections specifically noted “from the manufacturer” and separate from the primary information so product-specific information can be found. That area, however, **cannot** be a selling arena, or it will violate the purpose and benefit of the Web site.
- The primary, non-manufacturer site content should be centrally managed by an agreed-upon third party.
- The initiative must be a coordinated effort between manufacturers and an independent third party who manages the information flow and development, the editorial, getting approvals, managing the Web and video creation process, production, maintenance, obtaining low/best bids for the work, and regular reporting to participating manufacturers.
- While such a project must be centrally controlled, is should **not** become an expensive, huge and overly-complex corporate project. Nor should it become a black hole for creativity – it should be cool and youth-oriented but it’s not a marketing piece.

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Conclusion

It’s not all about video games and social networks and texting for today’s youth. Emerging is a well-informed, self-directed, and very much empowered generation who thrives on curiosity and immediacy. In that, they require instantaneous, relatable, and useful information, guidance, and gentle assistance in developing healthy, lifetime behaviors.

With this project, we will save lives and help build a new informed and empowered future (and present) consumer base. That is the true power of DTC.

NOTE: If you are interested in being involved in such an initiative, please let me know at DTCPerspectives@brandingpharma.com. If the industry stands up and participates, we’ll report it right here in *DTC Perspectives*. **DTC**

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