

WHY MILLENNIALS NEED IMAGERY TO CONNECT WITH YOUR BRAND

482988416, Mixnik

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DIVE
BRANDSTUDIO

A MARKETING DIVE PLAYBOOK

IN AN EVER-EVOLVING DIGITAL MARKETING ENVIRONMENT, MARKETERS IN EVERY INDUSTRY ARE LOOKING FOR A COMPETITIVE EDGE.

Based on recent research, it should be no surprise that many companies are looking to the millennial audience to provide that edge.

Millennials aren't just your average college student anymore. The audience has grown up and come into its own economic power, incentivizing a whole generation of marketers to come up with entirely new and authentic kinds of marketing.

"Millennials now make up the group that's moving away from pocket money and into spending money," says Rebecca Swift, Director of Creative Planning for iStock by Getty Images. "For advertisers, that's an attractive group to create relationships with. It's an audience of young professionals who are working full-time but haven't settled down yet, with lots of money, time, freedom, and a desire for excitement."



533049979, vgajic



This process isn't a new one. Every generation goes through their 'first time consumerism' embrace. But what's new about the millennial generation, however, is the effect they've had on how marketers approach this group and the channels these communications must use to promote new products and services.

Traditional marketing methods such as print and television are still popular, but – for millennials at least – these methods take a back seat to astounding growth in daily social media usage and imagery-heavy digital ad campaigns. Companies that want to engage this profitable demographic need to understand what makes the millennials such an integral part of a company's marketing strategy and why social media and imagery are the best way to reach them.

“IT'S AN AUDIENCE OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE WORKING FULL-TIME BUT HAVEN'T SETTLED DOWN YET, WITH LOTS OF MONEY, TIME, FREEDOM, AND A DESIRE FOR EXCITEMENT.”

Rebecca Swift, Director of Creative Planning for iStock by Getty Images

MILLENNIALS HAVE TAKEN OVER

The millennial demographic is notoriously difficult to define. There's no established universal definition, but in general millennials represent the generation sandwiched between Gen X and Gen Z, and the majority of millennials were born in the late 1970s to late 1990s.

Despite the fact that there's no perfect consensus on what makes a millennial, we do know that the millennial age group officially overtook Baby Boomers as the largest living generation in 2016¹. It's also estimated that by 2017, millennials will have an annual spending power of \$200 billion² and that by 2020, millennials will account for 50% of the workforce³. The size of this general demographic paired with its spending power and representation in the workforce makes millennials very attractive to brands that want to flourish among today's consumers.

The immediate buying power of millennials won't stop today; it's also an indication of the impact this generation will have on future generations. As millennials establish careers and build families based on their brand preferences, the values and brands that connect with them emotionally will inherit a second life.

¹Pew Research, "Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America's largest generation," <http://pewrsr.ch/1Ta1G2l>

²Forbes, "2016 Is the Year of the millennial Customer," <http://bit.ly/2gdO2AX>

³PwC, "Millennials at work: Reshaping the workplace," <http://pwc.to/1QilHGJ>





MILLENNIALS TELL STORIES WITH IMAGERY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

While millennials weren't born immersed in computers and smartphones, they were the first generation to come of age as digital natives. As millennials entered their formative teenage years, email, texting and social media took over consumer technology. The millennial generation used technology like instant messaging programs and early social networks to develop relationships with real life friends and individuals around the world alike.

"Technology changed the way millennials process and react to information," says Swift. "Social media became a natural progression, a native environment in which they feel free to express themselves, not a place where they feel concerned for their safety and privacy as other generations do."

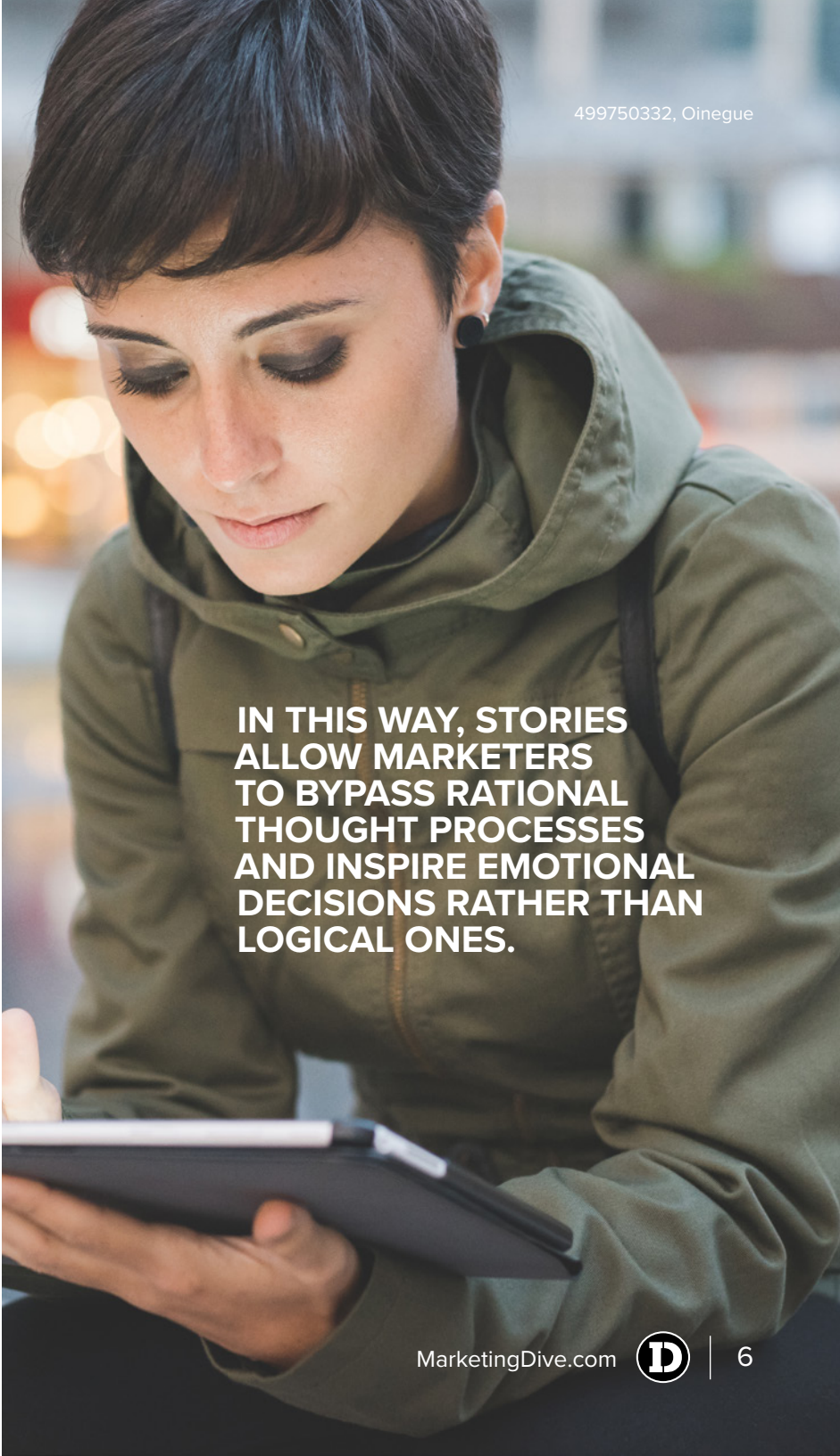
Using technology to communicate at such a critical development age – and using it to form relationships with individuals who lived very different lives – has resulted in a generation that views life and relationships from a digital and global perspective.⁴ While marketing for previous generations focused on aspirational imagery such as acquiring the perfect car or fixing the perfect holiday meal, millennials are drawn to interesting people, a diverse world view, and stories that express individuality. And from stories, millennials receive a quick hit of both information and emotional authenticity.

It's no wonder that storytelling quickly became a central value for millennials. As it turns out, narrative language, or the language of storytelling, doesn't use the processing and comprehensive powers of the left brain. Rather, it triggers the auditory, olfactory, visual, sensory and motor cortexes that cause the brain to experience what is being read.⁵ In this way, stories allow marketers to bypass rational thought processes and inspire emotional decisions rather than logical ones. When marketing to millennials, that's another way of saying that stories are the ultimate vehicle for connecting purchasing decisions to emotional authenticity. Through stories, millennials feel connected and informed, and their buying habits follow these values: millennials prefer to avoid outright consumerism and instead support brands and products with a social mission.⁶

⁴ The G Brief, "Millennials are the "Global Generation," <http://bit.ly/2fLkZq3>

⁵ Copyhackers, "Storyhacking: Cracking the code behind the irresistible selling power of stories," <http://bit.ly/1Mlv55S>

⁶ American Marketing Association, "Millennial Demand for Corporate Social Responsibility Drives Change in Brand Strategies," <http://bit.ly/2ga0aBA>



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The millennial age group's passion for imagery in video and pictorial form is revealed in the popularity and success of all of social media platforms. All major social networks use imagery to communicate – some almost exclusively – and the vast majority of millennials use social media: 88% of millennials use Facebook, 72% use YouTube, and 59% use Twitter.⁷ Seventy-nine percent of millennials share their own photos online and 81% share videos, as well.⁸

⁷ AdWeek, "How Many Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers Use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram?" <http://bit.ly/1hVj3Zp>

⁸ Pew Research Center, "Photo and Video Sharing Grow Online," <http://pewrsr.ch/1EEIPIX>

Functioning as an accessible, virtual repository of experiences, characters, relationships and stories that reflect how they see themselves, social media has quickly become a powerful tool to study and market to millennials. And since even the first social networks like MySpace relied heavily on imagery and video, it's clear that the millennial preference for imagery was present from the start.

477773201, knape

BUILDING AUTHENTIC VISUAL CAMPAIGNS

Millennials are the first generation brought up in a modern, digitally-enhanced marketing world. Naturally, this affects how they respond to marketing initiatives and their expectations for the quality and style of those initiatives. Here's how your brand can use the visual language and behavioral insight from millennials to enhance its social communication efforts.

1 | Use marketing to tell stories

Only 1% of millennials say that advertising can improve brand trust.⁹ That's right – your company's investment in straight-forward, aspirational advertising only resonates with 1% of your target audience. Instead, brands need to create marketing that reflects the millennial's preference for authentic, creative storytelling around the company, its products, or the market it serves. Stories that tell deep truths will help millennials connect with your mission, not just how your products will improve their lives.

"The story needs to be the start of everything you do," says Swift. "Don't base something on trying to sell, but base it on a story. That's difficult, because it's practically the opposite of what marketers

⁹Forbes, "10 New Findings About the Millennial Consumer," <http://bit.ly/2ga84Lg>

do, but it's the most effective way to create a story that will truly resonate with millennials."

2 | Tell stories with imagery

Words can be misinterpreted or require translation. But imagery is a shortened, globally-accessible version of storytelling that happens at the speed of life through social media. Because social media platforms focus so much on imagery and short text segments, millennials get a quick hit of connections simply by logging in and using their eyes.

"Through industrialization and mass literacy, the majority of the population deemed words as the best way to communicate and educate," says Swift. "But we're all human, and humans love shortcuts. Imagery is a lightening-fast shortcut to meaning, feelings, and emotions, and it's completely universal. Because we interpret visuals more quickly, we can get more out of our short period of time than it would take to write or say something."

3 | Don't underestimate your audience

While millennials are tech-savvy, they're also curious to rediscover and preserve what they consider an original medium.¹⁰ We see this play out in what seems like a contradiction but in reality is a member of this demographic being true to his or her own story:

¹⁰ Digiday, "Why Millennials Are Afflicted With 'Early-Onset Nostalgia,'" <http://bit.ly/1MEuYEr>

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the millennial who is passionate about Instagram photography and buys a Fujifilm or Instax camera from Urban Outfitters; the millennial who subscribes to Google Play but also owns a record player and a formidable vinyl record collection; and the millennial who owns a Kindle as well as a growing library of paperback books.

“This is a younger generation that’s discovering or remembering their youth for the first time through the traditional versions of technology,” says Swift. “Don’t expect them to always seek out the new and the flashy; follow the story to see what is going to resonate with them and consider how your product will give millennials an original, authentic experience.”

4 | Engage with your audience

The data boom of the computer age often distracts marketing firms with analytics, estimates, and reports on past behavior. However, with millennials, absolutely nothing is more effective than speaking

with them directly. In fact, 62% of millennials say they’re more likely to become a loyal customer if a brand engages with them on a social network, and 42% say they want to co-create products with companies.¹¹ Ask and observe so you get your information from the source: your millennial customers.

IMAGERY IS A LIGHTENING-FAST SHORTCUT TO MEANING, FEELINGS, AND EMOTIONS, AND IT’S COMPLETELY UNIVERSAL.

“Marketing teams have incredible access to information about what millennials want,” says Swift. “The information is there for the taking, but businesses have to adapt how they communicate. Get on social media and observe. Look at what millennials are looking at. Connect with their needs and interests without manipulating or reading what you want to hear in what they’re saying.”

¹¹Forbes, “10 New Findings About the millennial Consumer,” <http://bit.ly/2ga84Lg>



499654066, AleksandarNakic



5 | Find your deeper mission

Seventy-five percent of millennials said it's fairly important or very important that a company gives back to society in addition to making a profit, and 50% of millennials go out of their way to purchase products from companies that support causes that are important to them.^{12,13} This often seems counter-intuitive to older generations who prioritize the quality and price of the product, but it shows that millennials sometimes care more about the company's mission than the product itself. This means that it is simply not optional for your brand to discover its unique story or global mission and weave it into your marketing.

“DIG INTO YOUR BRAND’S PURPOSE AND MISSION TO PRESENT A STORY THAT RESONATES WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS.”

Rebecca Swift, director of creative planning for iStock by Getty Images

“The millennial archetype is more socially aware and has a stronger sense of responsibility for how the world works than previous generations,” says Swift. “Dig into your brand’s purpose and mission to present a story that resonates with your customers; a sense of why the company exists and why people work there that’s bigger than just making a living.”

¹² Forbes, “10 New Findings About the Millennial Consumer,” <http://bit.ly/2ga84Lg>

¹³ Forbes, “2016 Is the Year of the Millennial Customer: Is Your Customer Experience Ready?” <http://bit.ly/2gdO2AX>

6 | Above all, be authentic

Because of this generation's focus on communication and self-expression, authenticity is a deeply held millennial value that reaches into how they live their lives, what kind of work they do, and which products they buy. In fact, 43% of millennials think that authenticity is more important than content when they read a news site, product review, or company website.¹⁴ Brands can't get away with anything that's not authentic anymore because millennials are driven to make sure they're putting their money where their values are.

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“When you have 2.5 billion people with smartphones taking images and talking about what they buy, you soon work out what's real and what's not real,” says Swift. “Social media gives millennials a voice and vehicle, and if they see something that's less than authentic, they'll say so and rally their community around it. If they want to be heard, brands must speak with a unique and honest voice – the more authentic and uninfluenced by marketers and brand management, the better.”

¹⁴ Forbes, “10 New Findings About the Millennial Consumer,” <http://bit.ly/2ga84Lg>





BUILDING AUTHENTIC VISUAL CAMPAIGNS

Millennials represent a large and powerful developing demographic. By understanding more about who they are and what they want, brands have a much better chance of engaging this audience and communicating the value of what each brand brings to the table. Ultimately, the brand that communicates the most clearly and authentically is the one that will reap the benefits of a generation with money to spend and values to defend.

Because of the millennial generation's early adoption of technology for relationships and entertainment, it's a generation that is uniquely primed to respond to imagery and social media engagement. Brands that use authentic imagery designed to tell stories rather than to sell products will benefit from a loyal and passionately-held following of millennial customers.

476777486, courtneyk

A photograph of two people sitting at a rustic wooden table. The person on the left is wearing a purple sweater and has a colorful tattoo of a rose on their forearm. They are holding a black cup of coffee with a white lid. The person on the right is wearing a purple shirt and has a large, intricate tattoo on their forearm. They are holding a white cup of coffee. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the table and the people's clothing.

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