The Millennial Mind: How Content Drives Brand Loyalty

A quantitative research study conducted by NewsCred in 2014
Methodology

In Fall 2014, NewsCred, the world’s leading content marketing platform, conducted a study to understand how millennials view content today – including the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The study surveyed 501 US millennials and was conducted by MBC Research. The results reveal that 62% of those surveyed feel that online content drives their loyalty to a brand - yet the content they’re receiving is turning them off by not helping them navigate their everyday problems, being too long, sales-driven, or not tailoring messaging to individual cultural interests.

The following insights are from the NewsCred study, with additional color from Yahoo and eMarketer.
Millennial is the word on every brand’s mind.
82M millennials consume online content monthly in the US alone.

*eMarketer 2014 millennial roundup*
By 2020, millennials will total more than $1.4 trillion in spending power.

*eMarketer 2014 millennial roundup*
Introduction

We are all familiar with the word millennial. If you aren’t, odds are you’re not in marketing, or have just returned to your computer after living under a rock.

To be fair, the definition of a “millennial” can vary widely. According to Wikipedia, a millennial, loosely, describes anyone born between the early 1980s and 2000. That means anyone from the age of 15 – 30+. That is a lot of people. Yet, typically when people refer to millennials, they are referring to 18-25 year-olds. The biggest opportunity for brands is building long-term relationships with tomorrow’s leaders, influencers, and big spenders.
The landscape today:

32% of millennials find today’s brand communications helpful.

45% don’t find today’s content marketing compelling enough to share.*

*2014 Yahoo Study: Content Marketing: Best Practices Among Millennials
The sad truth: millennials are not impressed with your content marketing

While content presents an amazing opportunity, brands have their work cut out for them. Millennials can call B.S. faster than any other audience. They consume copious amounts of content, but lose interest in under 10 seconds. They are identity obsessed. They like to laugh. They are “independent” (or at least they want you to think they are). They crave cultural relevance. They want to read your brand’s content, but unfortunately, they’re not really feeling it right now.
Why isn’t your content winning the hearts of millennials everywhere?
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1. Your demographic was too broad to be hyper-relevant
According to NewsCred’s Survey, millennials respond positively to content when it is:

- Tailored to my age: 54%
- Tailored to where I am: 55%
- Tailored to my cultural interests: 63%
When it comes to engaging millennials, creating content tailored to their individual interests is extremely important. This means you need to keep in mind their age, location, and cultural interests at all times. You also need tools to help you develop a deep understanding of who they are, where they are, and what motivates them.

What does this mean for your brand? Before defining content topics, celebrity endorsements, and sponsorships, understand exactly who your audience is and if your audience even cares. While your overarching target audience can be wide, you can’t serve content to a demographic of “20-35 y/o males in the US.” It needs to be served to “Women, between 23-25, who live off of the Bedford Ave. stop on the L train in NYC, love listening to St. Vincent, and shop at Beacon’s Closet” or “Males between 28-30, who live in LA, listen to Tyler the Creator, and wear head-to-toe Supreme.”

Also, you need to know if your audience cares more about what Beyoncé wore when she performed at the Barclays Center, or that Fleetwood Mac is playing Rose Bowl. It may sound like a joke, but the truth is, millennials only have time for content that is relevant to them.
2. You decided you didn’t want to be useful or helpful
64% of millennials respond positively to content that is useful.

30% refuse to read content that doesn’t either entertain or educate them.
Millennials are bombarded with over 5,000 marketing messages a day. They have learned how to completely ignore the things that don’t deliver value into their lives. If your content is dead weight to their day, they don’t have time to read it.

What does this mean for brands? Be useful! Create content that either inspires, educates, or entertains. If it doesn’t do one of those three things, hit the delete button and start again.

NewsCred’s survey found 31% of millennials are more likely to buy if the brand delivers interesting content that teaches them something.
3.

Your content was boring and stupid.
60% of millennials will only share content if it is thought provoking and intelligent.

41% of millennials said the main reason they abandon content is that it's too long.
NewsCred’s survey found that 60% of millennials only share content when it is “thought provoking and intelligent.” So what is the opposite of that? Boring and stupid. Those two words are probably not the ones you want associated with your brand.

Aside from your content inspiring, educating, or entertaining your audience, it also needs to be a positive reflection of your brand’s perspective. It should elicit thought and sharing. It should feel smart. In 2014, our average attention span is less than that of a goldfish*. Does that mean every article should be a listicle? No. The days of long-form content are not over. This just means that content should not feel like an empty marketing ploy.

What does this mean for your brand? Form a perspective and a point-of-view. Take a step back from the content you create and question whether or not it will contribute to an interesting discourse. If your content is thought provoking and intelligent, millennials will share it.

*Statistic Brain
4. You didn’t want them to get all emotional on you
According to NewsCred’s Survey, millennials share content when:

- It's a cause I believe in
- It's thought provoking
- It's funny
Do you like to laugh? Great, so do millennials (and just about everyone). But it isn’t just about laughter, it’s about emotion.

Millennials want a reason to connect with your content, and in turn, your brand. **If you can build an emotional connection with someone, it means you can build trust.**

What does this mean for your brand? First, determine which emotional responses are aligned to your greater brand purpose. Is the emotion hope? Or is it happiness? Once you determine a set of emotions, then you can use these as an internal gut-check for your content. While you are creating it, and while you review it.

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70% say their main reason for sharing content is that it makes them laugh.

NewsCred Millennial Survey 2014
You texted a link to your Myspace profile.*

*that’s not a real thing
NewsCred’s Survey found that Facebook and Google are still the top places millennials search for content.
Millennials basically started posting to Facebook from the womb. Ok, that is an extreme exaggeration. But the truth is, **millennials consume content across a number of different platforms, and their favorite platforms change with the wind.** Part of maintaining relevancy is putting your content on the right channel. According to NewsCred’s survey, Google and Facebook still win when it comes to searching for content. Facebook also leads the charge when it comes to sharing content for millennials. Yet it is important to marry these insights with the cultural interests of your target millennial.

What does that mean for brands? If you are trying to reach millennials between 18-25, odds are they are checking a different platform than if you were trying to reach dads between the ages of 30-35.
4 brands that are doing it right
Netflix is great at using both targeted and shareable content to promote its exclusive programming. In the ramp-up to the release of season two of its hit show “Orange is the New Black,” Netflix hosted an interactive Twitter event, created a Twitter hashtag for one of its most popular characters, and developed a mobile app filled with shareable content of its own.

The results? 98,407 social mentions in one week before the season two premiere, with 98% of them positive.*

Netflix’s overall subscribers surpassed 50M that quarter, which Netflix’s CEO and CFO attributed to the success of “Orange is the New Black.”*
According to a study by Rosetta Marketing, 37% of millennials say they are receptive to cause marketing and more likely to purchase items from brands associated with doing good. In other words, Gen Y Cares about issues like sustainability, LGBT equality, animal rescue, or helping the poor, to name a few. There are so many wonderful examples of cause marketing but Tom's “One for One” program, which helps one person in need for every pair of shoes purchased is a good one to emulate, as well as Verizon's recent "Inspire Her Mind" ad reminding us of the serious disparity between women and men in college science and math programs.
Denny’s: Combining authenticity with the right format

Format is extremely important when it comes to reaching millennials. An October 2013 survey by *The New York Times* found that 34% of millennials watch mostly online video and no broadcast television. But in order to create content with authenticity, sometimes you need to tap into the creativity and credibility of a third party source.

In an attempt to reach their 18 to 34 demographic, Denny’s created a branded web series with College Humor called “Always Open,” which featured Dave Koechner talking off-the-cuff with his fellow comedian friends at Denny’s. Will Arnett and Jason Bateman from “Arrested Development,” stand up Sarah Silverman, Chris Pratt from “Parks and Recreation,” and Kristen Bell, star of “Forgetting Sarah Marshall,” all appeared on the show.

The results? According to Ignite Social Media, the web series paid off. Denny’s impression score rose from 6.2 to 25.4 among 18 to 34-year-olds.
In order to make content young people will trust, accept, and like, you need to know about the decade that formed them and shaped their consciousness, said VICE’s Chief Content Officer Eddie Moretti. “In the decade of the 2000s, it was the march of two opposing forces – a crisis of information and the liberation of information.”

The biggest casualty of the decade, however, was a loss of trust. “Millennials lost trust in politicians and experts and systems [social security, etc.],” said Moretti. They also lost trust in the media.

As far as the “liberation of information” - that came with the rapid advancements in computing, connectivity, and social media. Basically the rise of digital and mobile access.

Though millennials have the reputation of being self-indulgent selfie-takers, VICE found through direct conversations with their fans that they do care deeply about the world they live in, and they were looking for a non-traditional source to keep them informed.
The information is endless when it comes to the complex millennial demographic. Aside from the insights and stats that we shared, the following charts from NewsCred’s survey will give you a general look at some useful information that helped shape these takeaways.
Content sharing amongst millennials
Mainly share personal content

Mainly share professional content

Share depending on social network

When it comes to content shared…
When asked "what gets you to share?"

- It's original
- It's relevant to my circle of friends
- It's a cause I believe in
- It's about current events
- It's thought provoking
- It's funny

NewsCred Millennial Survey 2014
Tailored to their age
Tailored to their cultural interests
Tailored to their location
Taking a stand on social issues
Referencing people they respect
Useful
Tailored to the brands they use

Millennials prefer content that is:

NewsCred Millennial Survey 2014
Millennials and brands
When asked how much millennials read communications from brands:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NewsCred Millennial Survey 2014
When asked where millennials engage with brands:

- Social media: 50%
- Company website: 60%
- Email newsletter: 30%
- Articles about the brand: 20%
- Through their app: 40%
- Text message: 10%
- None of the above: 10%

NewsCred Millennial Survey 2014
Millennials prefer brands that:

- Fit my price point: 60%
- My friends use: 30%
- I know and trust: 70%
- Have a great product: 80%
- Are transparent in business practices: 50%
- Interact with me on social: 20%
- Share helpful, relevant content: 40%
- Have great advertising: 30%
- Have a social mission: 20%
- Are locally owned: 50%

NewsCred Millennial Survey 2014
Full disclosure:
This report was created by a bunch of millennials at NewsCred.
About NewsCred

NewsCred is the world’s leading content marketing platform.

We’re powering marketing technology for the future – helping brands transform the way they connect with people, build brand love, and win more customers.
We provide the most comprehensive content marketing solution.
Get in touch!
press@newscred.com | 212-989-4100
Thanks!