



# Marketing To Millennials

## or How to Become Friends With Gen BuY



BY DEIRDRE CARROLL / SENIOR EDITOR

**NEW YORK**—If we recited a list of the top 10 brands that resonate with the 18 to 34 year old demographic no one would be surprised by the names on that list. But if you aren't Apple, Nike or Coca Cola, how do you get Millennials to pay attention?

For our last installment in 2015, VM's Millennial Project reached back out to some of the ECPs that have appeared in our special editorial series throughout the year to get their takes on several issues: the importance of brands, both in terms of the perception of eyewear brands and what building a brand at retail really takes, as well as the sort of marketing that speaks to this demographic (hello digital!) and how important social purpose messages really are.

For Millennials, it is no longer about businesses "selling" to them. The new modality is business as ally, as collaborator, as friend; and with buying power in the billions, Gen BuY are the kind of friends your brand, and your business, wants to have.

### Anchor (Brands) Away

Each of the ECPs we spoke to agreed that well-known, recognizable brands are often important anchors for getting Millennial customers in the door. They're just not always what they end up purchasing.

"Brand recognition is more important for Millennials than for any other generation," stated Carissa Dunphy, optician at Duvall Advanced Family Eyecare in Duvall, Wash. "Major brands that are more than just glasses, such as Nike and Coach, resonate. Millennials are very concerned about upholding their image and wearing a particular brand is a part of that. Patients will walk into the dispensary with the intention of purchasing a specific brand."

Ric Bennett, assistant manager of Spex in Chicago, said, "The brands Millennial patients gravitate toward are those with high visibility and recognition. Patients will come in for a Prada, Ray-Ban or Tom Ford frame simply because their social out-

**More →**



# Marketing To Millennials

lets are most familiar with those designer names—regardless of how they actually fit or work for their prescription. Our job is to re-educate them to give a full picture of the best options.”

Daniel Brunson, store manager, Hicks Brunson Eyewear in Tulsa, Okla. said, “Brand recognition is important because in our store we carry mostly independent collections and only two licensed brands, Ray-Ban and Tom Ford. Our Millennial clients do seem to be drawn to those two brands at first, however, there is a sizeable and growing group of them that is moving toward our independent brands. These trendsetters are looking for eyewear that all of their friends do not already wear, and they have moved on to brands like Masunaga, Face à Face and Zero G.”

“When Ray-Ban, D&G or Oakley are all they know, introducing them to the hottest underground indie brands like Dita, Matsuda, Barton Perreira and Ørgreen, gives them a sense of individuality and prestige,” agreed Ryan Horne, owner of Spex by Ryan in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. “Those brands, along with Andy Wolf, Thierry Lasry, and Harry Lary’s, give them striking styles they see famous socialites wearing across social media. Once a few start wearing them locally, it snowballs as their friends all want something similar.”

Beginning the cycle all over again it would seem. Perhaps the more general and infinitely more nuanced response from Justin Coleman, OD, at Visionworks in Lexington, Ky., summed it up nicely. “Brand recognition can be a double-



©Stock.com/EvaKatalinKondoros

“There is a sizeable and growing group of them that is moving toward our independent brands. These trendsetters are looking for eyewear that all of their friends do not already wear.”

– Daniel Brunson, Hicks Brunson Eyewear

edged sword for many Millennials. Like most people, brand recognition helps with anchoring; these companies have a reputation and a history of their quality. But, sometimes these established brands are like big, heavy ships, unable to change course.”

## To Market, To Market

Speaking of change, the sort of marketing Millennials respond to is also significantly different than previous generations. They generally reject traditional advertising, preferring instead to build relationships with brands and retailers, most often digitally.

“We have tried to put a spin on our marketing to be applicable toward the digital consumer,” said Dunphy. “More of our marketing mediums are digital than ever before: e-letters, social media, texting selfies. Integrating Facebook with traditional marketing methods has also proven effective, but anything digital really has helped us resonate with Millennials: online scheduling, electronic medical records and patient history, etc.

“Additionally, more brands are acquiring their own customers from social media than ever before. It used to be that it was our job to introduce the brand to the patient. Consumers are now finding

More →

# Marketing To Millennials

brands via social media, then seeking those brands in retail locations. REM Eyewear and Kaenon are two great examples of this.”

“Digital marketing through photo sharing services like Instagram is important, but you are not really marketing in the traditional sense. You are opening up a window to your brand’s culture and in-

optical shop, it’s free advertising that they signed up to see. Of course, if an Instagram account gets to be too much like spam, it will be unfollowed quickly, that’s why it’s important to do it the right way. Include your patients (with their permission) by reposting photos they tagged of themselves in their new frames, show off new things happening in your store or

businesses with limited staff that sort of targeting is beyond consideration.

“Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a must for any business because that makes it more visible. But what happens once you’re seen? This is where good old-fashioned word-of-mouth comes in,” he continued.

“Millennials love giving reviews, and not just bad ones, because we like to be useful to others and want our voices heard. Brand recognition is nearly impossible for all but the ‘big guys,’ so the only way smaller ventures can have something similar is to rely on what others say about them. Millennials seem to be less swayed by the ‘Mad Men’ way of marketing. It seems disingenuous. Hearing someone else speak highly about a product just seems more honest,” Coleman said.



“My clients post images of themselves, tagging my business and it is the best digital format of word-of-mouth marketing possible.”

– Ryan Horne,  
Spex by Ryan

teracting with your followers in a very real way,” agreed Brunson. “This is different than creating ads and sales pitches. Think of it as brand building and remember that people in general, and especially Millennials, put a high value on authenticity.”

“Instagram is the biggest tool we have for marketing,” declared Tiffany Welch, managing optician at Sight Optical Boutique in Grand Rapids, Mich. “It is an app that people are already logging into dozens of times a day, and if they follow your

highlight new frame arrivals.”

“Social media is what drives Millennials, more than anything else,” confirmed Horne. “My clients post images of themselves, tagging my business and it is the best digital format of word-of-mouth marketing possible.”

“Digital marketing has really changed a lot recently,” added Coleman. “Google something and it appears in your Facebook ads. Targeted digital ads are the current big thing. Small companies can’t keep up and since most ODs are small

## The ‘Promise’ of Social Purpose

The perception of honesty, integrity and supporting the greater good is often touted as the way to reach this demographic, but it needs to be implemented in a way that resonates. If not communicated authentically, or if it doesn’t provide Millennials with the opportunity to share the good they are doing with their social networks, it can often fall flat.

“Social purpose is very important to Millennials,” stated Brunson of Hicks Brunson. “We have seen many newer companies, both inside and outside of the eyewear industry, responding to this with business models that maintain a charitable giving component of some sort. Sama Eyewear is a popular collec-

More →



# Marketing To Millennials



tion at our store that maintains a foundation to help drug addicted young adults.

"Some messages promote charitable causes like autism research, and others promote conservation through responsible and sustainable use of raw materials used in manufacturing. Each one of us has a cause that weighs more heavily on our heart than other causes. I would just say that the message has to be authentic to be effective," he said.

"As a Millennial myself, I am much more likely to spend a few extra dollars if the brand has a cause behind it that helps humanity, however, the absence of such a cause would not stop me from buying a frame I was crazy about," added Sight Optical's Welch.

"That being said, as an optician, I feel as if it's my job to understand the stories behind the brands I carry and translate that to my patients in a vernacular that they will understand," she clarified. "Even if the frame line isn't directly benefiting those in need, the story of a family owned line like Lafont will create more buzz if an optician can connect his or her patients with brands that share the same values. It's incredibly easy to make a difference in this world, so if they are already interested in the style of a line like 141 Eyewear, it's a great feeling to be able to share why this frame line is the best choice, as well."

"A message that makes us feel like we're part of something bigger; a cultur-

al revolution (Tahrir Square), a technological revolution (Steve Jobs/Apple), a giving revolution (Tom's Shoes), all make us feel like we belong and are doing more than basic consumerism," agreed Visionwork's Coleman.



**"I am much more likely to spend a few extra dollars if the brand has a cause behind it that helps humanity, however, the absence of such a cause would not stop me from buying a frame I was crazy about."**

– Tiffany Welch, Sight Optical Boutique

"When a company chooses to go above the basic requirements of business, it usually does so in a way that is mutually beneficial for both the recipients and the donors. Businesses that involve the consumers seem to have a richer, more active base. It generates a lot more word-of-mouth than the same old 'Business Donates Money' story," Coleman said.

"Both are good, but I'd bet you'll notice a difference when talking to someone who's eating a McDonald's hamburger and one wearing a pair of Tom's shoes. The person eating the hamburger likely won't tell you about the Ronald McDonald House

that helps support families of children with cancer despite it being a wonderful charity, but the person wearing a pair of Tom's won't be able to resist telling you how their message is 'For every pair purchased, they give away one free pair of shoes,'" he concluded.

"As a brand, we are socially responsible for creating a realistic message with an idyllic edge to inspire our audience to be better and reach more," explained Spex's Bennett. "We can give the message that our audience can obtain these ideas, and in fact deserves them, under the correct positive circumstances."

"I like to believe that the popularity of things like the

ALS Water Challenge, or the silent protest of #BlackLivesMatter, or painting ones nails in group solidarity to support transgender movements, have the greatest impact on Millennials but I am not sure those messages aren't lost in the excuse of just being able to post a video where we drown our friends in ice water," Bennett said. ■

