

# The Future of Conference Center Marketing

A Research Paper produced by the  
International Association of Conference Centers, North American Chapter

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Presented by the Emerging Trends Task Force  
to the Marketing Committee and the Board of Directors  
of the North American Chapter of International Association of Conference Centers.

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Newly formed under North American President Neil Pompan, the Emerging Trends Task Force was directed to present findings and observations on the future of conference center marketing and its implications for the industry. Specifically, the Task Force was asked to examine how Millennial-age meeting planners research and select sites for their events and how their approach differs from that of other age groups. The Marketing Committee observed that younger people are more attune to interactive media and that some of the more traditional methods of advertising and promotion may not work as well to reach Millennials.

In January 2007, Pompan and the Board of Directors announced the formation of the association's first Board Associate with a particular focus of identifying and advising the Board of Directors on emerging trends from the perspective of Generations X and Y and Millennials. This report was compiled under the direction of IACC's first Board Associate, Warren Call, and his team of Millennials who served on the Task Force.

## The Millennial Generation: Up and Coming

Just beginning to enter the workplace, The Millennial Generation was born between 1977 and 1998. The 75 million members of this generation are being raised at the most child-centric time in our history. Perhaps it's because of the showers of attention and high expectations from parents that they display a great deal of self-confidence to the point of appearing cocky. As you might expect, this group is technically literate like no one else. Technology has always been part of their lives, whether it's computers and the Internet or cell phones and text pagers.

Millennials are typically team-oriented, banding together to date and socialize rather than pairing off. They work well in groups, preferring this to individual endeavors. They're good multi-taskers, having juggled sports, school, and social interests as children so expect them to work hard. Millennials seem to expect structure in the workplace. They acknowledge and respect positions and titles, and want a relationship with their boss. This doesn't always mesh with Generation X's love of independence and hands-off style.

All Millennials have one thing in common: They are new to the professional workplace. Therefore, they are definitely in need of mentoring, no matter how smart and confident they are. And they'll respond well to the personal attention. Because they appreciate structure and stability, mentoring Millennials should be more formal, with set meetings and a more authoritative attitude on the mentor's part.

Provide lots of challenges but also provide the structure to back it up. This means breaking down goals into steps, as well as offering any necessary resources and information they'll need to meet the challenge. You might consider mentoring Millennials in groups, because they work so well in team situations. That way they can act as each other's resources or peer mentors.

Generation X and The Millennials: What You Need to Know About Mentoring the New Generations  
by **Diane Thielholdt and Devon Scheef**

## I. Research and Discussion of Millennial Marketing

### a. The marketing environment of the Millennial Generation

- i. In general this generation is completely overloaded with media. They have seen more marketing, more advertising and more hype, starting a younger age and in a more pervasive way than any other generation. They are largely numb to traditional marketing approaches
- ii. Because they have been exposed to this flood of information, Millennials automatically block-out advertising. Their BS detectors are very finely tuned and they can sniff our hype and spin better than older groups.

### b. Communication that resonate with Millennials

- i. Millennials are much more dependent on word-of-mouth recommendations and product information gathered through peer-to-peer social networks, even if they only met their peer through an online blog, rather than an actual personal acquaintance.
- ii. Millennials prefer an ever-changing and fast-paced approach where new information is unlimited and promotional material provides instant gratification. They have grown up using multiple media platforms at the same time; on

average Millennials consume 20 hours of media a day, but this is accomplished within only 7 hours of actual clock time.

- iii. Style and personalization are very important to this generation. It is important to customize the product and service, as well as personalize the format in which the advertising and promotion is consumed. Style is important and can include everything from image to green credentials.
- iv. It is vital to present integrated communication across several media outlets; Millennials consume every imaginable means of communication – often simultaneously, but they pay attention selectively. Marketing approaches should be interwoven so that an ad in one venue feeds off a different form of advertising in another venue.

c. Marketing approaches that impact Millennials – Our Recommendations

After reviewing relevant research and our conference-call discussion, the task force has seven recommendations for marketing to the Millennial Generation;

- i. Authenticity is everything – you can't hype them. Catchy slogans or jingles are not going to do it with this group, they will tune-out immediately. Promotions and advertising must focus on the value of the conference experience (quality/price/dependability/location/uniqueness) and the marketing has to be believable. If your marketing is honest about what you offer, consumers will create their own hype and buzz about your property (the "iphone effect").
- ii. Keep message going and keep it consistent; from ad, to customer service, to event, to follow up. If you are advertising top-notch service and attention to detail, then every phone call during the planning process, every break service, and every billing statement has to show it – otherwise your message will be seen as hype rather than real.
- iii. Accept a short shelf-life for your marketing campaigns. Present an ever-changing, always-fresh marketing approach; stun them, shock them, surprise them. But do so as part of a long-term marketing plan that shows a consistency of message and authenticity even as the day-to-day advertising changes. Think of doing the same job forever, but switching to use a different tool every few months.
- iv. Get the technical stuff right. Use email blasts, use online sponsorship, use links, but make sure it works. It is vital that the distribution list for your email newsletter or promotion is going to not only valid addresses, but actual people that have an interest in your property. **YOUR WEBSITE HAS TO WORK EVERY TIME.** If a promotion is sent directing customers to the website and the website does not work; you lose them and severely hurt your company image in the process.

- v. Provide as much personalization and customization as possible. Ask your customers how they want to receive promotions and customize each promotion. Tailor their experience at your property to be the most personalized possible event. Emboss their company motto on key cards, hang the logo in their meeting room, personalize the amenities in each guest room, change the wall colors in the meeting room, etc.
- vi. Give Back; Millennials as a group will always pick the company that gives back to the community and the environment. It is equal in importance to price and quality. If the price and quality are comparable, Millennials will choose the property that has the best green initiatives and the one that donates the most to the United Way.
- vii. Take advantage of user-generated content. Read the reviews your property receives at online sites. Read blogs concerning your center and your geographic market. Establish blogs and encourage your customers to post their comments – use them like public-forum comment cards. Send the planner the link to the blog before they arrive for their event. Monitor the feedback; if several customers commented on the nice pool, restaurant, etc., use this information to fine-tune your marketing approach. He who has the best customer-generated blog wins. NEVER manipulate information in these forums and NEVER post anonymous comments in an attempt to improve your reviews – you will get burned.

Founded in 1981, the **International Association of Conference Centers** is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting understanding and awareness of the conference center industry and to providing member properties with the tools necessary to provide an exceptional meeting experience. Active members meet a set of stringent Universal Criteria and agree to a Code of Ethics. Currently, the association includes approximately 400 members from the United States, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, France, England, The Netherlands, Germany and Japan. For more information, visit the IACC website at [www.iacconline.org](http://www.iacconline.org). *IACC = exceptional meeting experiences.*

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