

# Understanding Millennials from the Millennial Perspective

By Ryan McEnaney

Proper communication will allow you to earn and maintain millennials' business for the long term.

**B**eing prepared to connect with our next big horticultural consumer is important, but difficult to manage when we're simply trying to get through today. Especially in a year with COVID-19 presenting the biggest curveball of most of our careers, looking at future marketing efforts quickly falls to the bottom of our priority list.

But understanding the thought process behind younger consumers is no longer a forward-thinking idea, but rather one that is necessary to survive and thrive. Are millennials your "next big consumer" or the consumer that will help you survive this year?

## Hungry for Information

Research shows that the consumption of garden content has risen to the top of digital categories during these times of self-isolation. Those in the Gen X, millennial and Gen Z populations are looking for us. They care. They are hungry for information.

It is in our industry's best interest to maximize that opportunity by drawing in new consumers and giving them the tools for long-lasting success. We are the experts and need to give them the information so they're not learning how to garden from BuzzFeed (unless we can be the new source for BuzzFeed).

Having the knowledge of how to communicate with this audience is key, as they don't respond to standard marketing tactics of old. Remember that this is an audience that was young during 9/11, graduated from college during the Great Recession, and is the first generation to have social media during formative years.

So, the approach has to be tailored to their expectation of communications. It's not selling a dream but embracing reality. It's not projecting false hope but being direct. It's not about making life easy but being authentic.

## Authentic Communication

When I first started developing this talk years ago, I thought that my talking points were basic assumptions and wondered why it was even necessary. And then I took a step back and realized that I was making the assumptions I was rebutting. Of course I know how to speak to millennials; I am one! But I can't expect that those preceding me are subject matter experts. It's the same as me making assumptions about Gen Z. It takes research and conversation to understand how to speak to that group, just as it does for someone outside of my age group to speak to millennials.

Hence the origin of my conversation scheduled to take place at Cultivate. "It takes one to know one" rings true in my talk. I dig into having authentic communications with younger gardeners (and non-gardeners, because the "g" word is scary).

It's not hard, but you need to understand our "why" in order to best connect and build a relationship. Why are we interested? Why do certain approaches work and others don't? What matters to us and what topics should you avoid? Research-based findings are presented to give support to my conclusions.

In this talk, I share many assumptions about millennials (spoiler alert: most are true), and then break down the impact of those assumptions on communications strategies. We are a trophy-chasing generation. We're lazy and expect

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Ryan McEnaney is a garden communicator and fifth-generation family member at Bailey Nurseries. He also serves as spokesperson for the company's consumer brands, including *Endless Summer Hydrangeas* and *First Editions Plants*. McEnaney currently serves on the Board of Directors for the National Garden Bureau, as well as multiple committees for GardenComm, formerly the Garden Writers Association, and the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association.

*Editor's note:* As this issue was going to press, Ryan McEnaney was scheduled to present "Understanding Millennials from the Millennial Perspective" during Cultivate'20 Virtual in July. With the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) situation, please check [www.cultivateevent.org](http://www.cultivateevent.org) for the latest scheduling info on the event.

things handed to us. We want a promotion and raise yesterday; why haven't you given it to me? I said most are true, but why am I saying this about myself and my friends?

Where do those assumptions come from and how do they frame millennials' perspective on priorities in life? And how do they affect our shopping or experience with activities? Join me at the virtual Cultivate to chat more about this and how it can affect your business. This is not a plan for the future idea anymore, but a "necessary for today" marketing concept in order to survive COVID-19 and beyond. You have our attention. So, communicate properly so you can maintain our focus and earn our business for the long term.

"See" you at Cultivate'20 Virtual. 🍷

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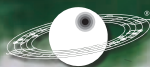
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