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Topic of the Year: Small but Kind of Mighty

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NEWS

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How millennials are changing our culture

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 a.paterlini@archeostoriejpa.eu**Keywords** Millennials, New Generations, museums

Marketing experts are obsessed with them: Millennials, the Generation Y of digital natives who do not visit museums. How to attract them? Five tips to turn Millennials into the rockstars of tomorrow's museums.

Today's museum visitors have been studied so extensively that we can almost claim to know everything about them. But what do we know about tomorrow's visitors? Millennials, or 'Generation Y', born from 1980 to 1995, represent the largest generation in human history. The marketing world has been obsessed with this multitude of young adults for quite some time now. Millennials do not go to museums – better yet, they devote only a small portion of their leisure spending to museums, far less than they spend on other activities such as eating out, going to the movies, going to a theatre or a gym. As revealed in a survey carried out by FutureCast marketing agency, published on its own Millennials Marketing blog (<http://www.millennialmarketing.com/who-are-millennials/>), less than 50% of Millennials visit a museum perhaps once a year, while the majority don't go to museums at all. Yet, when asked how they rate museums, Millennials answer that they enjoy museums and believe these institutions make a valuable contribution to society.

How can we attract them, thus? How can we turn them into happy, eager-to-return museum visitors? Here are five tips to turn Millennials into the real rockstars of tomorrow's museums.

1. A unique experience for the price of a coffee

Millennials hit working age around the same time the financial crisis consumed the global economy, so they place great value on fair pricing. A survey recently published by the Goldman Sachs Group (<http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/pages/millennials/>) indicates that Millennials are always on the lookout for free or cheap activities, and the youngest of them love deals and discounts.

Therefore, green light to free activities and events hosted in museums, reduced admission tickets at specific times, and low cost after-hours events aimed at young audiences. Family membership helps, but only up to a point. As a matter of fact, Millennials tend to increasingly delay starting a family, but they enjoy spending time with friends. Customized marketing initiatives such as 'two admissions at the price of one', or 'evening cocktail at the museum, admission including one free drink' can be helpful ways to encourage attendance.

Along these lines are the regularly offered ‘Mummies and Martinis’ at Penn Museum in Philadelphia, or the ‘Museum Party’ at the MADRE Museum in Naples, whose after-hours events seem to be greatly appreciated by Millennials.

2. Who are you calling a spectator?

Visionary artist Andy Warhol famously predicted, “in the future everyone will have their fifteen minutes of fame.” Thanks to the social media, Warholism is Gen Y’s reality. Millennials are the most self-absorbed generation recorded in history, not at all impressed by titles and positions in society. Having knowledgeable and academically trained staff may be extremely important for content accuracy, but their presence is not the key to inviting and involving into the life of a museum the members of this over-educated generation (over 60% of Millennials hold a college degree).

FutureCast’s research revealed that 80% of Millennials want to be entertained, while 40% want to be involved in the creation of products and brands. What does this mean for museums? Appealing to Millennials’ strong personalities by not only engaging them personally with museum activities, but also providing them with opportunities for content creation. One of the latest and ever-increasing trends in travel and hospitality marketing, for instance, is the use of crowdsourcing for the hotel industry. Basically, potential customers use the online community to share ideas and develop new products and services for the hospitality industry. This process inspires Millennials’ curiosity and creativity; by participating in the product creation process, they develop a very strong affinity with the product itself.

What’s keeping us from exporting the model to our museum? For example, opening storage facilities to virtual access and using the global online community to set up an exhibition based on users’ preferences and interests. A recent initiative that gathers crowdsourced research data is the Micropasts project (<http://crowdsourced.micropasts.org/>), jointly managed by the British Museum, the

University College London and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project consists in transcribing records and building 3D models of Bronze Age objects via a dedicated crowdsourcing website, which today has over a thousand members.

3. Make the experience (socially) ratable...

The millennial generation has captured the attention of marketers since its childhood days; as a result, Millennials do not trust traditional advertising. Pew Research Center report on Gen Y (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>) shows that Millennials prefer to learn from their peers about a website or a product. Unlike traditional marketing campaigns, user-generated content is believed to be unbiased and trustworthy.

This does not mean that decades of cultural marketing should be dismissed as useless; but, for example, it may be time to pay more attention to museum reviews on TripAdvisor. Pew Research Center reports that 70% of Millennials feel a responsibility to share feedback online after either a good or a bad experience. In other words, a Millennial who has enjoyed visiting a museum can be the best-ever ambassador!

Travel-blogs are another valuable resource. More and more travel brands promote their business by offering bloggers either sponsored accommodation or special visits in hopes that the bloggers will mention and rate the experience in their blogs. Museum blogging is not very common yet, but its potential was tested, successfully, by pioneer projects such as the Uffizi Gallery’s #UFFIZIARCHEOLOGIA, or the initiative taken by the Archaeological Park of Classe during its inauguration day last summer.

4. ...while offering them a chance to unplug

Millennials are the digital natives par excellence. More connected and wired than any generation before, according to FutureCast’s research Gen Y spends around 18 hours a

day consuming media, 5,4 of which on social networks. Therefore, Millennials expect their museum visits to seamlessly conform to their digital lifestyle. By way of response, most major museums are in the process of either installing or testing the latest technologies to improve visitor understanding and enjoyment of their collections: QR codes, touchscreens, 3D reconstructions, multi-sensory experiences and beacons - a Blu-ray technology app that tracks visitors' locations and provides their smartphones and tablets with information about objects in ranges of a few inches to several meters. They are all excellent ideas, but apparently such an abundance of technology may prove for the Millennials too much of a good thing.

Of course, they expect to find plenty of interactive tools online, and all the information they need to enjoy the museum visit at its full potential; but once they have crossed the museum's threshold, it is a different story. During his presentation at the *Indy Redefined* conference in October 2014, Indianapolis Museum of Art Curator Scott Stulen stressed that, in museums, Millennials want to unplug from technology, at least for a while. Museums must be smart entertainment centres offering the opportunity to marvel at something unique that cannot be experienced outside of their walls, unplugging from the frenzied life of everyday hyper-connection and fragmented communication consumption. In sum, there should be a limit to technology in museums.

5. Tie in with a good cause

Finally, most studies agree that Millennials really care about charitable donations, and they are the most socially conscious consumers ever. This is good news for non-profit organizations surviving thanks to donors' support; so, it is good news for museums, too. True, Gen Y has money issues, but when it is for a good cause Millennials are willing to spend. They would also rather visit museums if part of the entrance fee were to support a good cause – i.e. restoration and preservation of cultural heritage, or educational activities for socially disadvantaged groups. The McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, for instance, hosts special events (regularly sold out) where individual tickets sell for around \$75 in order to finance free admission to the museum on the second Thursday of every month.

Millennials tend to be idealistic, and if they feel they can trust the mission of an organization, they will be willing to donate. Transparency should be the principle inspiring museum management of funds, an activity that may become especially attractive when associated with the promotion of art restoration projects or special activities for the local community.

If after reading this article you feel overwhelmed by the Millennials' demands, prepare for the worst: Generation Z (born 1996 to 2000), with its terrific purchasing power and the average attention span of a goldfish, is right around the corner!

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