2 hrs ago

Five design principles to attract the Millennial traveller

The Millennial generation is often described as fickle, work-shy, narcissistic and driven by a raging sense of entitlement.

NB: This is a viewpoint Peter Ballard, partner at Foolproof.

But our design research tells us that their basic, human, emotional needs are pretty similar to any other generation who aspire to have strong, lasting friendships, find fulfilling careers, live in safe and secure homes, find a life-partner and stay healthy in body and mind. Millennials are no different in this regard.

But the Millennial generation is more mobile, better travelled and has more opportunity to explore the world than any other generation. And they are a tough bunch to please, expecting a lot from travel brands when it comes to seeking inspiration, booking a holiday and meeting their needs while travelling.

For Millennials, the experience and the product are one in the same and the lines between the digital and physical experience are less defined, if at all. This presents challenges to travel operators, but also opens up opportunities to engage with this generation in new and interesting ways, and to create personalised travel experiences that feed their desire for authenticity and cultural immersion.

Brands need to sit up and take note; by 2019 there will be 17 million Millennials in the UK, accounting for a quarter of the population. To resonate with the Millennial mind-set brands need to learn how to design product and service experiences for this group of consumers.

Here are five guiding principles for travel brands designing for the Millennial traveller.

1.   Design frictionless experiences

Millennials have finely tuned expectations of what a good user experience should be and won't tolerate poor service or a substandard experience. In their eyes, a brand that has invested in designing a beautifully simple, intuitive, user experience has demonstrated a commitment to its customers that goes beyond simply the interface.

Airbnb and Uber for example owe their successes to the effortless, and largely mobile, experience they offer as much as the disruption they brought to their industries. CityMapper also recognised its user interface had to be more intuitive at helping people navigate cities quicker than Google or Apple.

The message is clear for brands. Make experience design the foundation on which you build differentiation and competitive advantage. Identify and ruthlessly eliminate the pain-points customers have through every touch point in the organisation, digital and non-digital. Seek out the best designers you can possibly find to create beautifully elegant, frictionless customer experiences.

2. Be authentic

Millennials are naturally cynical about advertising and intolerant of inflated promises and false claims. They favour word of mouth and advice from friends or family over information received through advertising. They can sense the difference between those companies that demonstrate their commitment to customers rather than those that just claim it.

According to Inkling, millennials are influenced by family and friends (72%), search engines and reviews (50%), social networks (21.4%) and bloggers/experts (20.2%). Our research shows that independent review sites such as TripAdvisor are often a more trusted source of reviews than a hotel's own website. Travellers will cross-reference reviews on a hotel website with TripAdvisor before booking direct.

Websites such as Like a Local and Showaround use local knowledge such as where to eat and what to see, which very much fits with the Millennial's preference for authentic, local experiences. Travel brands also have a wealth of good photography and video at their fingertips from real travellers. VisitTheUSA uses real video journals to showcase popular US destinations, while G Adventures encourages travellers to submit photos to be featured on their Instagram feed.

Brands should build engagement with this generation through smart use of social media and the development of advocates and brand ambassadors. Two thirds of 16-24 year olds said they are more likely to become a loyal customer if a brand engages with them on social.

New technologies such as Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality also present an exciting opportunity for travel brands looking to create content in this space.

But don't make claims, let real customers tell others what it's like to be a customer of your brand. The product or service needs to deliver since these channels can turn equally viral if a service turns out to be poor.

3. Make products and services personal

If a Millennial will trust a dating site to find their ideal life partner, then simpler decisions such as choosing a holiday will happily be delegated to a computer algorithm without a second thought.

This generation has grown up surrounded by data, but using it confidently to make the right decision has got harder and more stressful. As millennials move through the various life stages, their willingness to embrace algorithms in the relevant areas of their lives will only increase.

VisitTheUSA for example has a nice slider to tune a trip based on categories such as Lively vs Quiet, Beach vs Mountain, Swimsuit vs Parka. Round the World Experts recognises that travellers no longer shop in one place for their travel needs but source inspiration and make bookings through multiple providers. Its 'Trip List' gives travellers the ability to collect items that interest them, such as experiences and accommodation, from across the internet for reference later.

The real opportunity for brands looking to attract Millennials however lies in designing products and services that can learn our behaviours, the patterns of our consumption, our personality traits and preferences. Artificial Intelligence is one such technology with the potential to offer this functionality. Millennials will look for brands and technology that help guide them in making confident and correct decisions. (Or increasingly, make them for us and lets us know what they were.)

4. Reward loyalty in unique ways

This generation is very aware of its power as consumers. They know that their custom is valuable to brands and want to be rewarded for it. This doesn't have to be financially. It can be in terms of how they are made to feel, or what privileges they get for being a customer.

Millennials want to be made to feel important as an individual, and that they are being listened to. They know companies have data on their habits, their previous purchases, and their value as customers, and they want to see this used intelligently and sensitively to have some of that loyalty repaid.

Lodgeo and Hotel Tonight run a referral scheme where if you recommend the app and someone books, you receive hotel credit. Tourradar runs regular social media competitions where you can increase your chances of winning by liking, sharing and tagging.

But brands need to go beyond standard points-based loyalty schemes and think of the things that would really make a difference to a customer's experience with their brands such as exclusive access, tailored offers and personalised experiences.

5. Facilitate decision-making on the move

Millennials are the first major generation to have almost always had the internet at their disposal and therefore have confidence in technology to help them make snap travel decisions.

They also value experiences over possessions and, unlike all those that came before them, won't own many of the big ticket items that previous generations slaved to buy. This is partly driven by spiralling costs of such items but also by the fear of missing out. According to Inkling, 73% of this audience agreed that the fear of missing out is their primary motivator in seeking out new experiences and activities.

Unlike their parents Millennials don't feel the same need to plan ahead, they've grown up with being able to access the internet at any time they like. Why plan ahead when all you need is to hand via a mobile phone? No need to buy a map; just use Google Maps or CityMapper. No need to reserve tickets for travel or hotels ahead; just use HotelTonight and Flight Centre. No need to book a cab; use Uber.

But the implication of this user behaviour is that these solutions need to work well on the move, and not require a lot of user thought. Successful brands will be those with beautifully designed context-driven user experiences and intuitive interfaces.

Key takeaways

Millennials have grown up against a back drop of near permanent global recession, caused by the self-interests of global bankers, and a state of permanent war on terrorism. This is shaping their values, and what they want to see from the brands they want to reflect those values.

Millennials have a greater sense of belonging to a global tribe, and seem more ready to wear the responsibilities of stewardship of the world's limited natural resources and the inequalities that exist among its peoples.

But the prize is great, Millennials will soon account for more than a quarter of all spend globally, so brands need to understand, and work out their responses, to the preferences and behaviours of this particular group of consumers.

NB: This is a viewpoint Peter Ballard, partner at Foolproof.

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