

The Millennial Mindset

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Census Bureau defines the Millennial generation as those born between 1982 and 2000, placing the upper age range at 36 years old. The largest generation in US history, outnumbering Baby Boomers and representing more than one-quarter of the US population, they are poised to reshape the economy. They are outspending Baby Boomers 2 to 1 on self-care, and the ASDS 2016 annual survey reported that, in the prior year, patients under 30 saw 20% growth in neuromodulators and 100% growth in injectable filler procedures. As such, they represent a significant segment of the dermatology patient base and understanding how best to communicate with the individuals who comprise this singular collective is key to delivering the best quality and experience of care in a medical or aesthetic practice. A search of PubMed.gov yields no studies relating to the behaviors of millennial patients, and since many of the understandings of the millennial mindset have been developed in the finance, tech, retail, and wellness arenas, we can draw on these insights to enhance connection with the next generation of patients.

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INTRODUCTION

Millennial Market Share

Whereas dermatologists have always cared for patients in their teens, twenties, and thirties, the millennials are a specific generation born between 1982 and 2000. Millennials, as the largest generation in US history, are powerfully shaping the economy with many current estimates centering on Millennials' spending growing to \$1.2 trillion by 2020. The largest generation is also on its way to becoming our largest patient base. Millennials are proving to be interested and engaged in the realm of dermatology, with the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery's 2016 annual survey reporting that in the prior year patients under 30 saw 20% growth in neuromodulator procedures and 100% growth in injectable filler procedures.¹ Men are a large and fast growing segment of the dermatology patient base and, in 2017, the American Academy of Facial Plastic Surgery surveyed men about their interest in aesthetic treatments; of the 31% who responded "extremely likely" to pursue treatment, 58% were between 25-34 years old and 34% were 18-24 years old, making 92% of these respondents in the Millennial age range.² With our patient base changing, practices should evolve to meet the changing patient needs as relates to information gathering and clinical engagement or risk having outmoded approaches that aren't sufficiently adapted to the newer generational ideologies.

Developing Trust

Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research "Millennials: Coming of Age" report cites that brand name is not the deciding factor for the majority of Millennial purchases.³ Rather, this generation is described as "digital natives"; they are the first

generation to grow up with internet and social media.⁴ This translates to their referencing internet and social media prior to purchasing decisions rather than making a decision based on brand name alone. As pertains to deciding about trying a treatment or product, or visiting a practice or physician, this may mean that a Millennial patient may be less likely to trust in the brand or reputation of the product or the individual and may want to do his or her individual or crowd-sourced online research.

This research may or may not lead Millennial patients to be more informed when seeing a physician as a new patient or in followup consultation, but this generation has strong ideas about what is right for them; the National Study of Youth and Religion found 60% of Millennials think, in all situations, they'll just be able to "feel what's right" as their guiding morality, and the National Institutes of Health found 58% of college students in 2009 had higher scores on a narcissism scale as compared to in 1982.⁵ In managing these patients, assuming that they will have "read up" on a treatment or product and anticipating questions will help to establish trust and to demonstrate mastery since the physician's knowledge can be proven to exceed the quality of personalized and in-depth information that can be found online.

Creating an Experience

Millennials are disrupting the retail economy by demonstrating that they are what are being termed an "aspirational class" making carefully considered lifestyle choices around deliberate experiences and careful procurement. More than 3 of 4 Millennials would rather spend on an experience than on a physical

purchase.⁶ business.com referred to the Millennials creating an “experience economy” in which the real value of products is tied to the experience the products provide.⁷ As this translates to a dermatology practice, particularly one which incorporates aesthetic or wellness services, hosting exclusive events or having opportunities available only to your patients develops a sense of community. On a day to day basis, creating a culture that is one of helpfulness and education will create authentic engagement with a consumer who is not focused on accumulating purchases for the objects themselves. Retail consulting firm Marvin Traub describes in their November 2017 op-ed in *Business of Fashion* that this aspirational class focuses so much on experience-seeking because they are defined “not by their income level, but rather by their life choices,” which “subtly [indicate] social status.”⁸

This isn’t to suggest that Millennials aren’t spending. Forbes reports that they spend \$600 billion annually, which is 28% of all daily per-person consumer spending and they are forecasted to account for 35% of spending by 2030.⁹ When they do spend, it may be a myth that they want to purchase solely in the digital realm since data suggest that their wish for experiential engagement carries over into the shopping experience. Accenture surveyed more than 1,700 Millennials and 82% preferred a brick-and-mortar store experience to online.¹⁰ For practices that have a retail component, this places a premium on retaining highly trained staff who engage with patients and provide a high-touch experience with a focus on individualizing recommendations. Because Millennials are focused on having authentic connections and experiences, staff need to be engaged with discussing products you offer and not repeating information verbatim that could be accessed online. From a design perspective, a retail space that gives an enveloping experience without a generic clinical feeling also favors the feeling that the purchase process itself is a wellness moment of health education and self care.

Taking a Comprehensive Approach

Retail trendspotting blog Field Agent found that Millennials were spending twice as much as baby boomers per month on self care.¹¹ The genre of self care incorporates both physical and mental health with the goal of improving the way one looks and feels. NPR theorized that the rise in popularity of this concept could be a reaction to ubiquity of imagery on social media since “comparing our lives to the perfection we see on the Internet [leads] us to utilizing online tools for self care — and the cycle continues.”¹² In 2017, Pinterest searches for “self care” are up 121%,¹³ and Instagram and Twitter have popular hashtags such as #selfcareisntselfish and #selfcaresunday, around which content and communities are organized.

Aesthetic and medical dermatology fall into this spectrum of self care services, and structuring the office visit and office

space itself to have elements that are calming and restorative will be appreciated by Millennial patients. For this generation, viewing each appointment as an opportunity to discuss caring for their skin in general and themselves as a whole is an important self care tie-in. For instance, someone who is seeking injectables treatment for the first time will also benefit from a discussion of how to limit ongoing photoaging from sun exposure and pollution via topical antioxidants and broad spectrum sunscreens. They will also benefit from education how to optimize their current skincare regimen, particularly if they are using the popular subscription box approach, which can lead to active ingredient overlap, and what options there are for further smoothing skin texture with retinoids and lasers, as appropriate. Additionally, touchpoints such as offering bottled water, perhaps branded for your office, show that you prioritize this sort of self care as a part of your practice’s ethos.

Building Loyalty

Once Millennials have a positive experience, they are proving to be very brand loyal. *Inc.* synthesized results from two recent reports on consumer trends to show that “Millennials are also the most loyal generation to their favorite brands, with just over half (50.5%) saying they are extremely loyal or quite loyal to their favorite brands.”¹⁴ They attribute this to brands creating authentic, high quality interactions at every touchpoint that earn the consumers’ devotion. This is a key point for medical practices, since younger patients can become loyal patients for decades into the future. It also suggests that, with Millennials having a strong digital footprint, practices need to be sure that their digital presence — even if not robust — reflects their brand voice so that it is an accurate reflection of what patients can expect when seen in person. Social media presence is something for a practice to consider strongly since Millennials are highly digitally engaged, but outsourcing this if it won’t have an authentic brand voice is inadvisable since inauthentic social media presence is worse than none at all.

One key element Millennials require to continue to engage with brands is transparent and fair pricing. When making a purchase, they will often look up products online prior to purchasing to ensure that they are paying a reasonable price or they will have researched this prior to shopping or having an aesthetic consultation. A 2017 report by Internet Marketing Inc. found that 72% of Millennials will do this sort of research prior to shopping.¹⁵ This is certainly applicable if your practice offers retail products, but also relevant to pricing of consults and procedures for which Millennials wish to be confident that they are not paying outside of the reasonable range.

Creating a Community

Millennials tend to see the brands with which they choose to surround themselves as important identifiers in their life, and as such will want to understand your values and what value

you in turn add to them. Creating exclusive opportunities to which being a part of your practice confers access can create a feeling of inclusion that is especially appreciated by this generation. For instance, a loyalty program for purchases is something that Millennials have grown to expect from many of the retailers from which they make purchases, and the Internet Marketing Inc. 2017 report found that 78% are more likely to choose a brand with a loyalty program than without one, and 69% belong to a retail loyalty program. Also, 95% appreciated brands that sent coupons and discount offers to them by email.

While many aesthetic and medical practices do not engage in percentage or dollar value discounting, loyalty programs with points accrual may be appropriate for skin care products, and gift cards with purchase at the holidays or with other special events may be a more suitable means of creating a perceived value. Surprise treats such as a gift card mailed for patients' birthdays or a sample of a new skin care product with a handwritten card mailed to patients who are fans of the brand are also ways to create a feeling that being a part of the practice garners access to a privileged experience not available to others, nor elsewhere. These thoughtful means of outreach are meaningful to Millennials who have been accustomed to walking into a store and having a coupon beamed into their phone automatically due to retailers' deployment of app-based geolocation.

CONCLUSION

As the largest generation, Millennials will be a critically important portion of the patient population. They will play a centrally important role since they will become a generation who not only drives demand for innovation in product, procedure, and practice design, but who can also be a hub to bring their children and parents in for care over the years if a positive and loyal relationship is fostered. As with any physician—patient interaction, a better understanding of the patient's clinical and psychosocial needs better informs the physician's ability to deliver nuanced care. Therefore, the more depth of understanding physicians can have regarding the mindset of Millennial patients, the higher the quality of care we can render.

DISCLOSURE

The author has no conflicts of interest with the information described in this article.

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