

# THE SPONSOR DOC

With Bruce L. Erley, APR, CFEE

## What's With Those Millennials?

### **Dear Sponsor Doc:**

*I feel like the millennial generation is wreaking havoc on my events! Many of my sponsors want to know what we are doing to attract them. I'm not sure what I need to produce that will appeal to them or even how to market to them. They seem so difficult to "manage" as a demographic group. Any ideas for me?*

*C.O. St. Petersburg, FL.*

### **Dear C.O.**

Yes, this is a daunting question indeed for event producers. I would think that as my wife and I raised three full-functioning Millennials (now aged 30, 29 and 27), this would be intuitive for me, but it is not.

Let's first define what a member of the millennial generation looks like. Millennials (also known as Generation Y) birth years range from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. They are not a monolithic group. Young Millennials are presently aged 18-24. Mature Millennials are now 25-34 years old.

We need to really pay attention to them as well. Pew Research reports that this year, the Millennial generation is projected to surpass the outsized Baby Boom generation as the nation's largest living generation. Millennials are projected to number 75.3 million, surpassing the projected 74.9 million Boomers (ages 51 to 69).

In terms of marketing to them, companies are fiercely competing for millennial mindshare, reports Forbes. There are eighty million millennials in America alone and they represent about a fourth of the entire population, with \$200 billion in annual buying power. Companies have been struggling to connect with this generation because many of the traditional methods of advertising have proven ineffective at capturing their attention.

From Cone Communications' most recent report on Millennials, here are some additional key traits of this generation that our events can effectively address:

- Millennials are more likely to spend their money on experiences rather than things.
- Millennials seek activities that they can enjoy with their friends.
- Millennials use social media to amplify impact. They regard it as their megaphone to share

their experiences and promote the things they care about.

- Millennials are fervent in their support of corporate social and environmental efforts. They want companies to tell them how they are striving to improve the world around them.
- Traditional communications channels just won't cut it with this wired audience. They are far more likely to utilize social media than the average consumer. The shift from traditional media to social media will be game-changing as companies try to break through to this always-on audience.
- Millennials want to be entertained and engaged! The group prioritizes videos, infographics and games as communications platforms.

That is where festivals and special events have a great opportunity. What can we do as producers to attract, interact and engage Millennials at our festivals and events? It is more important than ever before to bring our events to life through compelling content, visual storytelling and interactive experiences.

- Be sure to paint a compelling picture of the social benefits of your event or organization and what it is worthy of support.
- Having a concert? Turn it from a spectator event to a participant event through creative activations like having the crowd text their choice for the next song.
- Promoting an endurance event? Encourage participants to register with a group of friends and use it as a fundraiser for a cause they care about.
- Instead of having the standard beer garden, bring in a small batch distiller and create a "bourbon and bacon" pairing.

- Rather than provide another banner or booth, offer your sponsors the opportunity to provide a "content rich" submission for your Facebook page that will enhance your guests' experience.

So there you have it C.O. The Millennials are here to stay and will have a profound impact on festivals and special events in the future. Embrace them! Learn as much as you can about them. Hire them to help influence your programming and marketing. And remember they love experiences and you have the ideal platform to deliver them.

With more than three decades in sponsorship sales and consultation, **Bruce L. Erley** is the President and CEO of the Creative Strategies Group, a full-service sponsorship and event marketing agency based in Denver, Colorado he founded in 1995. Accredited in Public Relations (APR) by the Public Relations Society of America and a Certified Festival & Events Executive (CFEE) by the International Festivals and Events Association, Erley is a highly-regarded speaker on event marketing and sponsorship having spoken on the topic around the world in such places as Dubai, Vienna, Beijing, Toronto and New York.

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