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Reaching Multiple Generations In The Workplace *Communicating to the 21st Century Workforce*

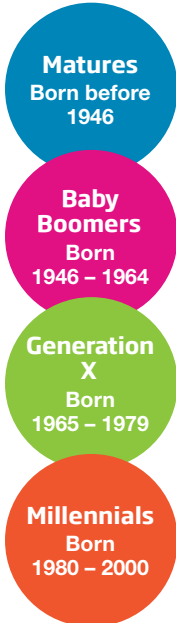
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Today's multigenerational workforce is unlike any other that has come before. In the past, most companies could count on employing workers from one or two different generations; but today—particularly because people are working well into their 70s and even 80s—many companies can experience up to four generation gaps among their employees. With this 50-year age-range between the oldest and youngest employees, it's imperative that HR professionals not only understand the distinct characteristics and traits inherent to each generation, but also provide them with incentives, rewards and enticing benefits packages—tailored to fit each generation—that will attract and retain valued employees.

Know Who's Working For You

Cam Marston, who is considered the leading expert on the impact of generational change and its impact on the marketplace, has a clear understanding of how generational demographics are changing the landscape of business. In his book, *Generational Selling Tactics That Work* (2011), he analyzes the major generations of our time. Each generation—Matures (born before 1946), Baby Boomers, (born 1946–64), Generation X (born 1965–79), and Millennials (born 1980–2000)—changes the landscape of business and demonstrates how understanding generational differences—such as the benefits they value most and the ways in which they want to be engaged—will have a positive impact not only on sales and marketing but also management, motivation and perhaps more importantly, recruiting and retention.

According to a recent study commissioned by Barclays, six out of ten employees rate a comprehensive benefits package at the top of their list when looking for a new job; however, 85 percent felt that their current employee benefits packages failed to provide the support and flexibility required to meet present and future financial needs.



Additionally, in a new 2015 *Workplace Benefits Report* from Bank of America Merrill Lynch, human resources professionals are spending more time on healthcare issues than ever before, with 74 percent feeling under-qualified when it comes to issues regarding employee healthcare and retirement benefits, simply because each generation values benefits differently. For example, among the HR professionals surveyed, 68 percent believe that Boomers value financial wellness more than any other generation, yet only one in five large firms indicated they utilize targeted communication for specific generations.



Tailor Your Plans To Fit Their Needs

According to Amanda Emery, a marketing expert with Trustmark Voluntary Benefit Solutions, utilizing employee surveys is a great way to glean information about how individuals of different generations prefer to be engaged. They also provide a useful roadmap for tailoring targeted messages, whether addressing them face-to-face or via e-mail and text. It's important to identify topics of concern and follow through with education to address them.

Emery has found that millennials, in particular, don't think about the big picture with retirement and benefits, nor do they typically have savings stored up like many of the older members of the workforce. Boomers and Matures, on the other hand, have more need for comprehensive coverage. They're also leaving the workforce with more debt. To address such a broad spectrum of needs and concerns, many companies are trying to get as personal as possible, and as relevant as possible in order to reach people where they are rather than from where employers think they may be.

To this end, passive enrollment will no longer suffice because it lacks the educational component people need in order to understand what is at stake and how it will impact their lives. Many employers are moving to high deductible health plans which are essential for the overall wellbeing of the entire organization to communicate the mechanics of those plans for higher engagement and understanding.

Tailor Your Messaging

Emery also states that marketing and messaging campaigns should consider more than just generational differences. Learning style, point of view and communication preferences are equally important. Everyone—despite his or her generation—has a different learning style, and it's important to design a marketing and messaging campaign that resonates throughout the company, resulting in greater success for the whole.



People generally learn through one of three distinct means: visual (30 percent), auditory (25 percent), and kinesthetic (15 percent), with some, 30 percent, learning through a mixture of these. Visual learners retain information best when it is presented through infographics, animation or “explainer videos,” which can increase learning by 15 percent. Auditory learners are exactly that: Good listeners who retain information by listening to podcasts, audio books, seminars and lectures. To optimize engagement of a targeted message and the information presented, verbal repetition is key. Kinesthetic, or tactile, learners are by far the most adaptable. They do well when information is presented in a variety of ways, including videos, animations, quizzes, surveys, games, slide shares and downloadable worksheets. Most people, however, possess some visual learning skills, as the brain processes images much faster than text, proving an easy way to effectively incorporate subject matter or key takeaways.



Beyond learning styles, it is also important to find common ground and speak to a person’s point of reference. For example, what are their life experiences? Do they have small or grown children? What world events have shaped their lives? Education levels also play a significant role in marketing to a multi-generational client base, as does an individual’s cultural environment, whether rural, urban, affluent or working class.



Millennials’ distinct attitudes toward benefits and strong preferences for communicating with their employers are undoubtedly a result of being raised on technology and coming of age during one of the country’s worst financial crises. In fact, the *Workplace Benefits Report* states that of the employers that employ Millennials, more than half (60 percent) believe Millennials value health benefits more than other generations, but they are much more likely to have targeted financial-wellness communications for Gen X-ers (43 percent) or Baby Boomers (91 percent) than Millennials (7 percent).



Why does this happen? Often because benefits budgets are limited. Most companies prioritize with Boomers preparing for retirement. Yet Millennials have long careers ahead of them, and making improvements to their financial wellness means improving the financial wellness of the fastest growing segment of the workforce.

Experts agree that optimal engagement and employee satisfaction is no longer possible without understanding the age demographics of its workforce. With the shift to a multigenerational workforce, employee benefits must have an emphasis on options; and marketing strategies must have a more thoughtful and targeted approach. Making these changes not only has the potential to increase engagement among employees, but also gives an organization the competitive advantage it needs to stay ahead in today's global market.



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