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# WHAT GENERATION GAP?

by Marsha Everton

## IN A WORLD THAT SWIRLS WITH

change, one constant is the importance of word-of-mouth in influencing decisions, driving over 70% of spending choices. What's changed is the media for the 'mouth' and the increased importance of personal recommendations. Word-of-mouth has expanded beyond in-person advice to include Internet-based reviews and social media – available on a mobile device that fits in your hand. Understanding and tapping into this mobile and web-based stream of influence is a significant marketing opportunity.

The two largest U.S. demographic groups are the big spending Baby Boomers and Millennials, drivers of spending growth – who now influence each other's decisions through highly interactive word-of-mouth communication. Baby Boomers are an enormous group of consumers – often compared to a pig in the python – moving as a large mass through the system, changing society and consumer spending at every life stage. When Boomers started having babies, birth rates accelerated again, creating the Millennials. So we now have two pigs in the python, both driving change as they move through life introducing new dynamics in word-of-mouth marketing.

As the Millennials were being born, two inventions disrupted the world we knew – the 1989 invention of the world wide web, and the 1993 introduction

*At AIMSights, we explore the unique perspectives of Millennials and Boomers as well as their intergenerational influences. Insight is added to analysis to apply our findings to product development, marketing, and communication.*

of the first smartphone, the beginnings of making massive amounts of searchable information accessible to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

The global disruption created by these inventions has been compared to the scale of disruption caused by the Gutenberg press, arguably the most important technological transformation in human history, forever altering the state of literacy and learning in the world. The impact of the current disruptive technologies is comparable to that transformation. We're on the verge of a new era driven by the convergence of forces: mobile, data, sensors, and location-based technology combined with social media. Every thing and every experience is changing as our society adapts to having massive amounts of data and information at our fingertips.

Millennials, born from 1980 to 1995, arrived during this period of technological disruption and grew up as digital natives with an intuitive understanding of the possibilities. Boomers have discovered they have a lot to learn. They're digital immigrants, constantly challenged with integrating these technologies into their professional and personal lives.

This disruption has created a technology divide and redefined how older and younger generations interact. For the first time in history, the younger generation has a stronger set of specific skills and knowledge than their elders. It's no longer just an *old-and-experienced-teaches-the-young* learning model. Learning flows in both generational directions. The two fat pigs in the python are talking to each other and influencing each's decisions.

Here are a few of our findings:

- Millennials rank word-of-mouth as the most important influence in their purchase decisions across all categories. Successful marketing programs will drive content creation for word-of-mouth communication.
- Boomers (86%) and Millennials (91%) are similar in their use of the Internet as a key source of information; 60% of Millennials primarily use their smart phone for access. Any Internet-based information should be designed with a mobile first approach.
- Millennials are social in person, not just on the Internet; 41% of them seek information from people at work; 52% of them, and 35% of Boomers, identify friends as a main source of information. Make it easy to share ideas. Give them stories to tell.
- Millennials are influenced by advice from their parents; 33% identify their parents as a main source of information. Keep parents informed too. And they have fond memories of eating with mom and dad; 65% of them routinely contact parents for recipes. Tap into the potential to strengthen this tabletop connection and enrich the experience.

Millennials are following their passions while Boomers are rewiring, not retiring... and they're giving each other advice and sharing information like never before. □

*Marsha Everton, in collaboration with Robin Albing, founded AIMSights, an international marketing consulting company with expertise in the purchasing and shopping behaviors of Millennials and Baby Boomers. Everton was president & CEO of The Pfaltzgraff Co., president of the National Tabletop and Giftware Association, and a board member of the International Housewares Association, National Retail Federation, and Bon-Ton Stores.*  
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