Generation "Why"

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The Global Gen "Why" Culture
Around the globe Gen Why-ers are changing the marketplaces and workplaces. While Europe's and Japan's Gen "Why" numbers are still small in comparison to the US, this is not true in other parts of Asia. In Vietnam for example 50% of its 90 million people are under the age of 30. They are highly IT literate, speak several languages, and will travel to fruitful markets. In China Gen "Why-ers" are a force of 200 million. The generation just behind Gen "Why" in China, those under the age of 18, is approximately 367 million, much greater than the entire population of the US. In Eastern Europe they are the first post-communist generation, and in Southern Europe the first post-dictatorship generation. In "newly rich countries" (South Korea, Greece) Generation "Why-ers" are the first generation to grow up in an environment of prosperity and stability. In South Africa, they account for almost a quarter of the population and when fully grown, by the year 2010, will double the size of the local Boomer Generation, accounting for a hefty 35% of the population.

Connectivity And Engagement In "Real Time"
No group before them has come into the marketplace and the workplace seeking this level of engagement. Worldwide this Gen "Why" group is accustomed to communicating in "real time", is used to an almost constant connectivity, and sees the world as borderless. Gaps, or lags in the information pipeline are confusing to them. In the US brands risk being toppled by this group of 70 million. With expectations as wide as an open prairie, these young adults share the belief they can create a life that is customized and retrofitted to their specific wants and needs. Therefore companies must find a way to connect, and communicate to this fluid, demanding, optimistic group to help grow their own bottom lines. So where do brands begin in communicating to this very different group of young adults?

Well, for starters it's going to take an ongoing two-way conversation. This is a group that wants a real relationship with their brands, as well as the employers for whom they choose to work. In a recent poll the brands that they most trust and connect to are: Apple, Trader Joe's, Jet Blue, In-N-Out Burger, Ben & Jerry's, Whole Foods, Adidas, American Apparel, Target, H & M clothing stores, Levi's, Volkswagen, Converse, and Vitamin Water.

What do these brands tell us about how Gen "Why"-ers think and feel about the world around them? Brands like Ben & Jerry's, Trader Joe's, and Whole Foods were in the forefront of bringing consciousness into the marketplace. They always communicated to their customers in a unique way that was highly engaging, and socially aware. By taking this communication style inside their companies and creating very strong connections to their employees, Whole Foods showed up #5 on Fortune's 100 Best Companies To Work For 2007. Other brands looking for insight into the communication style that will hold Gen "Why"-ers attention can draw some real lessons here. The "what" is important but the "how" is even more critical in communicating to this group. Gen "Why"-ers like style, amusement, a real voice, and a bit of attitude. They are looking for ways to bond with a brand. How will this perspective play out in the years to come as they grow up, begin families, buy cars, life insurance, and houses?

Socially Diverse And Environmentally Aware Group
In America, Gen "Why"-ers represent one of the most diverse demographic groups —
one out of three is a minority. They are the largest, most socially aware generation to date. While the boomer generation challenged many of the social norms on a mostly local level, the Gen "Why" generation have experienced social and environmental issues on a global scale via the internet. When polled, 69% of Gen "Why"-ers say they consider a company's social and environmental commitment when deciding where to shop. Moreover, 83% say they will trust a company more if it is socially and environmentally responsible. Of course product is still "numero uno" in what drives their brand choice. This means that if you're Converse you keep translating the original Chuck Taylor's into the coolest styles, if you're Apple you have to keep slicing up new, visionary tech innovations, and if you're Ben & Jerry's you keep concocting outrageous flavors with names drawn from popular culture. Having products that lead, the next biggest thing in its category and a brand that communicates that it cares about social/environmental causes in the world makes it especially golden in their eyes.

Need To Put Their Personal Stamp On Something
Although very keen on self-fulfillment, these group never needed to go searching on the self-help book shelves at Barnes & Noble. Gen "Why"-ers grew up assuming this to be part of life. As one Gen "Why"-er put it "A primary goal of people my age is not necessarily to become famous but to become distinctive." They want to put their personal stamp on something. It is no wonder that Xerox is looking to tap into this by using the slogan "Express Yourself" as a way to describe its culture in its company recruitment program. We are watching a group who uploads their videos on YouTube, and post pictures of their life on MySpace as matter-of-factly as brushing their teeth. Pew research found at least 54%, of those 18 to 25 have used social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook; 44% have created a profile featuring photos, hobbies, or interest. The technology firm IDC estimates that by 2010 about 70 percent of the world's digital data will be generated by individuals. Gen Why-ers and the generation coming up immediately behind will continue to contribute to this in no small measure. The pop artist Andy Warhol referred to this when he said: "In the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes." This generation is living this expression to the hilt.

Social Brand Community
Sharing who they are across social networks is part of their collective experience for them. Brands will benefit by approaching this group as a social brand community that will increasingly share and communicate over mobile technologies, with new intuitive touch screen interfaces. Brands as well as companies will have to evolve to offer a high degree of flexibility to interest Gen Why-ers in working for them as well as innovative ways to hold together this relationship in many decentralized locations. These will be the demands of the new Gen "Why" global culture.

Blending Life And Work Into A Whole Experience
Gen "Why"-ers think first about where they want to live and what kind of lifestyle they want to lead. Then they place their careers into that context and find jobs. They believe that life is to be enjoyed and see no reason why they can't balance work, family and personal lives. Brands need to understand how much this group wants to blend their lives into one seamless experience. This is very different from the career choices that their parents made where "the job" dictated everything. Enjoying life frequently took a back seat to career, and was put on hold until after retirement. This idea of enjoyment first is often hard for senior "boomer" managers to understand. Yet, if they allow for and consider some newer more flexible work style approaches they would find that Gen "Why"-ers can choose to be highly productive. Best Buy's Minneapolis headquarters recently transformed its rigid, herd riding culture, which equated physical presence with productivity into something far more flexible. The new, fluid structure called ROWE for "Results Only Work Environment" takes the attitude that performance on output beats watching the clock for hours any day. All of a sudden it is not where you work, the time of day you are working, or the amount of hours you choose to work, but your overall performance and contribution that counts. This makes total sense to Gen "Why"-ers. After all, this highly entrepreneurial group, who grew up multi-tasking with the
great advantages of technology, can create a flow chart, design a sales presentation, listen to music, while making a tomatillo quesadilla.

The Next Generation’s Engines Are Revving To Tip The Culture Even Further
What kinds of products and services will evolve out of the desire for blending life, work, hobbies, and interests? What new kinds of organizational work models will grow out of the need for a de-centralized, work life? Brands will need to learn how to blend the marketplace, the workplace, and the lifeplace to stay connected to this borderless Gen "Why" group around the world. Why would an established brand step through the looking glass and rewrite their linear rule book? Because the Gen "Why" writing is already on the proverbial wall and it is fluid, dynamic, and multi-dimensional. It has already tipped the world culture with enough force to see that the generation right on its heels is revving its engines in anticipation of tipping it even further.

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