

“Babies on Board” Come of Age

By Kim Dannies

Do you know who your future clients, competitors and colleagues are? Meet the Millennials, born between 1982 and 2004: they are our next greatest generation.

Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation by Neil Howe & William Strauss asserts that four generational types cycle our markets, each type similar to the same group that preceded it 80 years before. The “GI” or “Greatest Generation”, as Tom Brokaw dubbed them, were born between 1901 and 1924. These folks, 80 plus now, are driven by civic duty, conservatism, and commitment, often staying with one job or soap brand their whole lives. People born in 1925 through 1942 are part of the largely retired “Silent Generation”, known for their ability to adapt to difficult situations like the Depression and multiple wars. “Baby Boomers”, born between 1943 and 1960, still reign at the top of the corporate ladder with strong ideological, spiritual and narcissistic attributes. The irreverent, action-oriented latch-key “Gen-Xers” round out the cycle, born between 1961 and 1981.

The four cycles are now in repeat mode with the arrival of the “Millennials” (MELs), born between 1982 and 2004. As they begin to enter consumer and job markets as full-fledged adults it’s a good idea to find out what makes them tick.

MELs have the behavioral DNA of the Greatest Generation: they are passionate about traditional values, family, civic order, and revitalized government and institutions. (This may explain why my millennia-kids wanted to discuss middle-eastern politics and e-bay transactions while I wanted to go to the disco on a recent vacation.) Confident team-players, they work well in small groups- especially ones that involve technology and clear goals. They are refreshingly conventional, strong achievers, optimistic, and street smart. A meaningful job is more important than a career. They are morals-driven and self-policing. MELs are the first generation to grow up with a PC and a cell phone, and although they have more discretionary time, they watch substantially less TV than any previous generation. They multi-task better than any generation before them: just watch my daughters do homework while they view a DVD, text & talk on their cell phone, IM, and download music to their ipod as their nails dry.

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How do we deal effectively with MELs as prospects, colleagues and offspring? We need to create highly social, diverse, flexible, succinct scenarios with minimal rules and accountability. Our pitch must be meaningful and challenging and filled with detailed feedback because MELs thrive on resolving and stabilizing chaotic situations and creating order, purpose, and a sense of community. Wow — this group sounds promising — our babies are coming of age just in time!

BRAINTRUST

BUSINESS CONSULTING LLC

286 College Street

Burlington, Vermont 05401

802.238.8586

www.braintrustconsulting.net

BrainStorm ©2006 by Kim Dannies. I work with corporate and private individuals who want to explore new business possibilities, refine work/life models, and generate rewarding change. For more information about success strategies visit my website: www.braintrustconsulting.net or call 802.238.8586.