

SATISFYING THE “ME” GENERATION

Losing more than a little sleep about attracting Millennials and Gen Z customers to your restaurant? You're not alone. These two generations represent 100 million potential customers and almost \$250 billion in annual buying power. Way too big for any restaurant to ignore.



But how do traditional restaurant brands connect with customers who want a restaurant's menu to bend to their unique whims? Who expect new and adventurous dishes that not only taste amazing but look great on Instagram? How do restaurant brands understand the motivations of customers who spend more time tapping on a screen than talking to the person across the table?

If you glance at the piles of restaurant industry market research out there, it's easy to write off Millennials and Gen Z as Sriracha-swilling, thrill-seeking foodies who snap photos of their food while snacking on it. They value the opinions from social networks over restaurant critics, and see their next meal as more than sustenance— it's their next awesome Snapchat post.

For those of us who remember rotary phones and the thrill of faxing for the first time, the challenge of connecting with the digitally-dependent population looms large. How can restaurants attract Millennials and Gen Z customers ready to swipe left on any brand faster than the speed of a Google search?

DIGGING DEEPER—TURNING NUMBERS INTO KNOWING

Restaurant companies spend ample resources to gather and analyze customer data with the goal of uncovering insights into consumer behavior. Number crunching can reveal preferences and patterns, but doesn't reveal the passions and purpose that drive customer actions.

To understand why Millennials and Gen Z flock to Panera and Chipotle, you need to dig a little deeper and uncover the “why” behind the choices they make when it comes to dining out.



WHAT MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z CUSTOMERS WANT FROM YOUR RESTAURANT

- 1) Fresh, flavorful, craveable food**
- 2) Convenience across every online and offline channel**
- 3) A company culture that aligns with their beliefs**
- 4) An experience that makes them feel more like themselves**



EAT WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY

THEY'RE HAVING IT THEIR WAY—CUSTOMIZATION AND CONVENIENCE

Restaurant industry data show that Millennials and Gen Z expect to customize their food order to their specific tastes of the moment. Why is this desire so important to these consumer groups? Millennial and Gen Z connect to their world digitally, where information, shopping, and their social groups are never more than a finger-tap away. Since they literally carry their world around in their pocket, these consumers want what they want when they want it. If they can't find it at one restaurant, they're off to the next—Yelping all the way.

For these fully wired generations, customization and convenience aren't just polite requests. They're requirements. For Millennials and Gen Z, their real and digital worlds are pretty much the same thing. These customers want to do business with you any way they choose—by ordering online, or through your app, at the drive-thru, or in person. Those experiences must be seamless, consistent, and of equal quality.

It's not enough to just push sales behind the counter or at the table any more. You have to respond equally well when your customer is pushing buttons.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SERVE—IT'S WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Millennial and Gen Z demands for local and sustainable foods shouldn't be news to any restaurant operator. But like the concept of convenience, these demands have quickly evolved into expectations. Local and sustainable are your costs of entry these days, not differentiators.

These customers also expect your company to tackle the lofty challenge of improving the world. Millennials and Gen Z don't accept conventional ways of doing things, and they expect the companies they do business with to do business their way. Supporting a charitable cause, composting and recycling, eliminating food preservatives, and investing a portion of your profits back into the community are a few ways to more deeply connect your brand with younger customers.

Food photos are the second most popular content category on Instagram, right behind selfies.



SHARED MEALS BECOME SHARED EXPERIENCE

Your Millennial and Gen Z customers might look like they're paying more attention to their phones than the plates in front of them. But food quality and freshness matters to them, even more than local or sustainable sourcing. These adventurous eaters want more than a Pinterest-worthy food photo—they want menu items that taste amazing.

Satisfying this desire also drives the need for transparency. Millennial and Gen Z diners aren't satisfied to have their meals magically appear from behind a counter or through a swinging door. They want control over what appears on the plate. They want to watch your staff chop and cook those ingredients that they picked out. They want more than a peek behind your curtain—it's the backdrop for an experience they want to share.

REPLACING BRAND IDENTITY WITH BRAND EXPERIENCE

When the Nike brand exploded in the late 1980s, you couldn't turn the corner without bumping into someone wearing a t-shirt or shoes sporting that iconic swoosh. Why were so many people willing to plunk down serious cash for wearable Nike billboards? Because they embraced the brand's spirit and wanted everyone to know that they identified with Nike and its brand beliefs. Kids bought Nike posters of Michael Jordan and Bo Jackson, and dreamed about being them.

Cut to today. Millennials and Gen Z don't want to identify with your brand. They want your brand and your restaurant to give them a complete experience, one that feels just like them.

If this sounds a little out there, think back to a time when you visited a restaurant that drew you in the moment you walked through the door. Everything about the place—the music gently thumping in the background, the warm yet subdued lighting, the mix of natural materials in the décor, the bubbly energy of the wait staff—felt comfortable and inviting. The kind of place that made you want to cozy up to the bar for a cocktail or sink into a cushy corner booth for a few hours. The kind of place that felt like it was made for you.

That's how your Millennial and Gen Z customers want to feel when they come in to your restaurant. Or check out your menu on your web site. Or order lunch to go on your app. Like it was all made just for them.

The best way to get your restaurant brand to resonate with Millennials and Gen Z? Move beyond a cohesive brand identity and build a branded experience that tells your story while telling theirs.

Traditional restaurant brand identity is about consistent logos, menu boards, and color schemes.

Today's great restaurant experience goes beyond the traditional and makes the customer feel like the place was made for them.



CREATING SYNERGY WITH YOUR BRAND

Connecting your restaurant brand with those coveted Millennial and Gen Z customers starts with the basics—creating craveable, great-tasting food that your kitchen can turn out quickly, while turning a healthy profit. It's not just what we do at Synergy—it's our sweet spot. We travel the world to uncover all aspects of what makes restaurants great, so we can help you keep up with your customers. Over the past 30 years, we've helped over 1,000 restaurants like yours reduce expenses, improve efficiencies, and grow.

When you invite us to spend time with you and your team, we arrive without preconceived notions of what to recommend or fix. We take the time to understand your company's goals and culture, and make our team part of your team. Everyone brings something valuable to the project, and we work hard to help your team members feel valued and an important part of the process.

A successful engagement is more than a great outcome. We want everyone to feel good about how we got there. Let's get started today.



**Contact us for your initial
consultation**

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