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**Oh, to Be Young, Millennial, and So Wanted by Marketers**

By HILARY STOUTJUNE 20, 2015

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The makers of Tic Tacs had a problem on their hands.

After 18 months of internal study, they had concluded that the all-important millennial generation might not be content with a mere mint.

No, the millennials wanted entertainment, release from boredom, “emotional rescue.”

So this month a new and more amusing [Tic Tac](http://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/news_home/New-Product-Launches/2015/05/Tic_Tac_shakes_up_portfolio.aspx?ID=%7BF0FEA65B-C531-4C00-848D-8B6DBAE9787D%7D&cck=1) is coming to store shelves — the Tic Tac Mixer, which changes flavors as it melts on the tongue. From cherry to cola, for example, or from peach to lemonade.

It’s yet another play in the millennial mania that is overtaking all manner of businesses, and seems to be getting more obsessive by the day. Not since the baby boomers came of age has a generation been the target of such fixation.

But this has a 21st-century style of urgency — with 24/7 micropandering, psychographic analysis, a high-priced shadow industry of consultants and [study](http://www.unitymarketingonline.com/catalog/product_detail.php/pid=202%C2%98subid=228/index.html#details) after [study](http://uspotatoes.com/understanding-millennials-how-do-potatoes-fit-into-their-lives/). (A few from recent days: how luxury brands can connect with millennials; what millennials think about restaurant loyalty programs; and which emotions most influence the purchasing decisions of millennials. Answer: anxiety and empowerment.)

Photo



Jason Dorsey of the Center for Generational Kinetics, which focuses on “generational context.” Credit Ben Sklar for The New York Times

All cater to a generation, generally viewed as people born from about 1980 to 2000, whose youngest members aren’t even out of their teenage years.

Goldman Sachs has gone as far as to [research](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121773/goldman-sachs-right-millennial-moms-still-run-households) what (older) millennials are naming their babies. GameStop, a leading purveyor of video games, promotes its “insider knowledge” of the generation. Even coffee — an industry that would seem to have the generation in the bag — is frothing.

“The reality is that Gen M-ers drink more specialty coffee than any other generation,” wrote Heather Ward, a research analyst. “As specialty coffee professionals, how do we make sure we are giving them the attention they need?” she continued in a [paper](http://www.scaa.org/chronicle/2015/04/06/the-millennial-marketplace-shifting-values/) prepared for the Specialty Coffee Association of America.

But some analysts and consumers have begun to ask, what about the rest of us? After all, the millennial generation has less wealth and more debt than other generations did at the same age, thanks to student loans and the lingering effects of the deep recession. Though millennials are hailed as the first generation of “digital natives,” the over-40 (and 50 and 60) sets have become pretty adept when it comes to smartphones and other devices.

Still, this most coveted generation is huge — about 80 million strong in the United States, larger than any other demographic group. And it recently crossed a milestone: As of March there are more millennials in the American work force than Generation Xers or baby boomers, according to the Pew Research Center. The consulting firm Accenture estimates that millennials will spend $1.4 trillion annually by 2020, and they are expected to inherit about $30 billion in the coming years.

“Why you’re seeing the fervor now is just where millennials are headed — out from the younger part of their life stage to where they’re in their first profession, they’re getting married, having children and influencing more spending,” said Christine Barton, a senior partner and managing director at the Boston Consulting Group.

As a result, businesses are terrified that if they don’t snare them now, they’ll miss the chance.

Last month, Whole Foods revealed that it would open a line of grocery stores “geared to millennial shoppers,” with a “curated selection,” “streamlined design” and “innovative technology.”

Not to mention lower prices.

The news media reported the development earnestly. But some people noted that better deals on quality produce might have a cross-generational appeal.

Robyn Bolton, a partner at Innosight, a consulting firm, responded [in a post](https://hbr.org/2015/05/whole-foods-misguided-play-for-millennials) on the Harvard Business Review website questioning the generational theme.

Whole Foods, she wrote, appeared to be saying that “Gen X and baby boomer shoppers are fine with or even prefer old, cluttered stores that sell a confusing array of stuff at high prices.”

**The Tech Generation Gap**

Marketers hail the millennials as the first generation of “digital natives” with singular needs and desires. But older generations also grew up with new technologies and devices that were revolutionary and disruptive for their times.

JUNE 20, 2015

By The New York Times

Ravi Dhar, the director of the Center for Customer Insights at the Yale School of Management, said the attributes that businesses were ascribing to millennials — including a dependence on technology — applied to the population as a whole.

“How people shop and consume information, that’s really changing beyond the millennials,” he said.

This month, the market research firm Forrester issued a [report](https://www.forrester.com/The+Kids+Are+Overrated+Dont+Worry+About+The+Millennials/fulltext/-/E-res122161) titled: “The Kids Are Overrated: Don’t Worry About the Millennials.”

It noted that consumers in their 20s were overwhelmed with educational debt and that those baby boomers were more affluent and bigger spenders, unhip though they may be.

“While some businesses must target millennials because of the nature of their products, most do not need to,” the report said. “When such companies do pine for twenty-somethings, they resemble the desperation of a nerdy teenager who, smitten with a prom queen, forlornly asks, ‘Why doesn’t she love me back?’ ”

Last month, Brittany Nicole Miller celebrated her 29th birthday. Her age makes her the target of much of the corporate affection, a fact that she says she has experienced “ad nauseam.”

Ms. Miller, who is also known as Piper, is divorced and works as a massage therapist and a model. She lives with two male roommates (who are not a couple) in a rented townhome in Danville, Calif., in the East Bay. She used Twitter to complain to Sprint when she had a problem with her phone (it worked), and she likes to buy vintage clothes and accessories.

In some ways, she is a stereotypical millennial; in others, she is not.

“It can be a little overboard, the generalizing,” she said.

The Republican National Committee took the generalizing to a mockable extreme in last year’s elections with an ad featuring a bearded hipster wearing glasses, bemoaning government regulation, a spot that was [roundly parodied](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZq_kh8KLFW8YaK7DzeGjP0tjE9v5Bfqw) by the British comedian John Oliver with his own bearded, glasses-wearing hipster.

Jason Dorsey, who at 36 considers himself among the older millennials, founded the Center for Generational Kinetics in Austin, Tex., five years ago and is often invited to speak about his generation at conferences and events. The center, which advises corporate clients in many industries, focuses its research efforts on “generational context,” he said, “not generational silos.”

Really, he and others say, millennials, especially their dependence on technology, are probably just a leading indicator of where life is headed for everyone.

“Being able to text message with a company we found is something every generation wanted to do even though we assumed it was just millennials,” he said.

“Definitely we want to be inclusive of millennials, “ he added, “but we don’t want to forget the people who brought us to the dance.”

A version of this article appears in print on June 21, 2015, on page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: Oh, to Be Young, Millennial, and So Wanted by Marketers. [Order Reprints](https://s100.copyright.com/AppDispatchServlet?contentID=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2015%2F06%2F21%2Fbusiness%2Fmedia%2Fmarketers-fixation-on-the-millennial-generation.html&publisherName=The+New+York+Times&publication=nytimes.com&token=&orderBeanReset=true&postType=&wordCount=1090&title=Oh%2C+to+Be+Young%2C+Millennial%2C+and+So+Wanted+by+Marketers&publicationDate=June+20%2C+2015&author=By%20Hilary%20Stout)| [Today's Paper](http://www.nytimes.com/pages/todayspaper/index.html)|[Subscribe](http://www.nytimes.com/subscriptions/Multiproduct/lp839RF.html?campaignId=48JQY)