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TWENTY-SOMETHINGS ARE HARD TO CAPTURE BUT LOYAL ONCE YOU'VE CAUGHT THEM.

By Andrea Renskoff

GENERATION Y, MILLENNIALS, ECHO BOOMERS, INTERNET GENERATION—CALL THEM WHAT YOU will, but at 79 million strong, the influence of these young Americans can't be underestimated. According to leading researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of several books including *Millennials and the Pop Culture* (Paramount Books, 2006), this group born in 1982 or later is the largest generational population since their parents, the baby boomers (born 1943-1960). Not only are Gen Yers positioned to lead the way in politics, global relations and entertainment, they already rule the world of consumerism. They've changed the way we use the Internet, the way we advertise and the way we shop.

Generation Y was preceded by Generation X, born between 1961 and 1981. Gen Xers are generally disillusioned, thanks to the effects of the Vietnam War, Watergate and Reaganomics. They tend to reject the values of earlier generations, especially the "superwoman" expectation of the women's liberation movement. Gen Xers are known for their cynicism—that's how the nihilistic term Generation X was coined.

As soon as Generation Y came on the scene, it became apparent that this younger group didn't feel the need to follow in Gen X's footsteps and, to this day, they resist any label. Gen Yers are a difficult group to categorize and they'll tell you that the mere act of trying to do so shows that you don't understand who they are.



Consider these revealing observations from researchers about Generation Y:

- As a group, they have greater regard for each other, their parents and their communities than previous generations displayed during the same phase of their lives.
- Since 1994, when the oldest Gen Yers hit 12 years old, the rate at which people under the age of 25 commit crimes has fallen 60%.
- Pregnancy and abortion rates for girls under 18 are down by one third, and voting rates and volunteerism are both way up.
- A huge percentage of Gen Yers move back home with their parents after finishing college.
- They tend to change jobs frequently and don't expect to stay in one career for their entire working lives.
- They'll choose a job working with their friends over one that provides a higher income.
- They are 40% non-white, and 60% have dated interracially.
- They rely on technology not just for work, but to maintain relationships and social networks—yet they still love malls.
- They worship celebrities.
- They've come of age witnessing the tragedies of Columbine, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina and Virginia Tech.
- A large percentage of them struggle with obesity and depression.

According to an International Day Spa Association (ISPA) study, 4 million teens visited spas in 2006. TeenSpa (teenspa.biz) in Burnsville, Minnesota, is one of a handful of spas that cater exclusively to the under-17 crowd. At the Phantom Horse Spa & Salon at Pointe South Mountain Resort in Phoenix (pointesouthmtn.com), a special menu details a Teen Skin Care Session with a facial and skincare instruction, a Teen Back Scrub for acne and a Teen Sports Massage. Parties for girls are now available at many spas, often hosted by parents who are spa-goers themselves.

Whether these offerings will produce the spa clients of the future remains to be seen, but it's promising when you note that even the goldmine enterprise known as American Girl, famed for its ability to draw tween-age customers, publishes bestselling books on grooming and stress relief. However, as you move to the older Gen Yers—those in their 20s now—the future isn't as clear. Currently their available money is spent on travel, technology and Starbucks, and getting that group to add spa visits to their priorities is another matter entirely.

The New Conformity

"People in their 20s want the massage, but they want it on top of a volcano in Hawaii," says Lisa Johnson, founder of The Reach Group consultancy (reachgroupconsulting.com) and author of *Mind Your X's and Y's* (Simon & Shuster, 2006), a book

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on marketing to what she calls “the connected generation.” (Johnson has created a podcast with the same title that can be downloaded for free at iTunes.com.) “This group is looking, first and foremost, for unique experiences,” Johnson says.

Focused on helping her business clients bridge the gap to this younger consumer, Johnson has outlined the connected generation’s ten cravings:

- **“Shine the spotlight.”** The connected generation is clamoring for personal recognition. They’re itching to stand out, stand up and be celebrated. Brands that tap into this powerful need will not only get a great buzz, but loyalty to match.
- **“Raise my pulse.”** Adventure is the new social currency. Venturing into the world, collecting exotic adventures and memories, and pushing personal limits, these customers are seeking highly interactive encounters that teach and challenge, give them personal insight and explore who they are.
- **“Make loose connections.”** This generation is rejecting traditional associations and club-style memberships in favor of loose connections that more accurately reflect their interests, lifestyles and busy days.
- **“Give me brand candy.”** Design is shifting paradigms and spurring people everywhere to rethink established products and industries. Distinctive design and innovation are vital to stand out and stay strong with this generation.
- **“Filter out the clutter.”** In a world that’s inundated with choices, editing—identifying “top picks,” for example—is a critical marketing phenomenon. Learn to build editing mechanisms into your brands, products and websites. In today’s global world, it feels good to be “in the know.”
- **“Keep it underground.”** The connected generation has grown up feeling saturated with advertising and marketing. They gravitate toward integrated, contextual offerings from trusted friends and members of their networks.
- **“Build it together.”** We’ve only just begun to tap into the power of web-based networks. The connected generation is becoming intoxicated by their growing ability to spark change—both as consumer groups and end users.



Seventeen Studio•Spa•Salon (seventeenspa.com) in Plano, Texas, has the younger Gen Y set pegged.

- **“Bring it to life.”** A Gen Yer’s everyday activities are orchestrated to deliver a dramatic sense of theater, taking typical experiences a few steps forward by engaging the senses, the imagination

Generation Gap

Researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss have identified what they call “generational archetypes” that have cycled and recycled throughout history since the 1400s. They reveal uncanny connections to today’s identified generations:

PROPHETS. Values-driven, moralistic, focused on self, willing to fight for what they believe in. *Modern example: baby boomers*

NOMADS. Tough, unwanted and cynical. *Modern example: Generation X*

HEROES. Conventional, powerful, institutionally driven, trusting in authority. *Modern examples: The GI Generation that fought World War II; Generation Y is expected to fall into this category.*

ARTISTS. Subtle, indecisive, emotional, compromising. *Modern example: The Silent Generation following World War II (before baby boomers)*

and the spirit, and transforming routine experiences into riveting entertainment.

- **“Go inward.”** The meaningful life is defined as the spiritual life, and spirituality has become a dominant value among today’s young consumers. They’ve embraced modern media and blurred the lines between secular and sacred, finding spirituality in all aspects of their lives.
- **“Give back.”** Today’s young volunteers want to give their time and talent instead of simply writing a check. Modern volunteer associations combine fresh structures with fun people and a chance to make direct, meaningful connections with the community.

“How can you combine the pampering of spa with adventure, networking and travel, and turn it into a group event to be part of a more full experience?” asks

Johnson. She suggests working with

Trent, president of Trent and Co. (trentandcompany.com), a public relations firm that specializes in healthy lifestyles. “Special events dedicated to these areas are blossoming in ways never seen before. A cluster of sponsors get together to present a party, a sporting event or a concert. If your spa is represented there, you can invite people into your world with a hand massage or a makeup touchup. You make them part of the family.”

Another inroad Johnson suggests is that of college athletics. “This generation is competitive and women’s sports is very important to them,” she says. “The same girls who get manicures, the Paris Hilton types, are also involved in sports.” Perhaps donating gift certificates to top athletes or working with athletic departments to let them know about your sports massage and wellness therapies is a way to build an emotional connection. As Johnson advises, “Go through an open portal.”



Cool Quotient

Leslie Villarreal got it right with Relax Now Day Spa (relaxnow.net) in San Francisco. She knew that other spas weren’t marketing to a younger crowd so she targeted them directly with an emphasis on brow and bikini waxing. Even her spa’s skincare line is designed for younger skin and packaged to please Generation Y. “So often we see spa designs featuring the face of a beautiful woman that no one can relate to,” says Villarreal. “At Relax Now we use cartoon images, bright colors and hip names for treatments. People in their 20s really are into glamour. You just have to market it right.”

Not Your Grandma’s Internet

The first frontier of the World Wide Web was access to information. But today’s and tomorrow’s Internet is less focused on searching for information and more intent on sharing it. Through the explosion of social networking, video and file sharing, instant messaging, podcasting, webinars, blogging and profiles, personal preferences are passed on, and then passed on and on. Word of mouth or, more accurately, word of keyboard, is the most powerful advertisement your business can have.

organizations that offer these types of experiences. Someone who receives that professional massage in a tent at the end of her hiking excursion will remember your name when she wants an after-work treat on a humdrum Wednesday. Introducing yourself off-site may be your biggest key to attracting 20-somethings into your spa.

Gen Yers are tuned in to politics and causes, the dangers of chemicals, the Green movement—all ideas that are consistent with spas, says Nancy

Just as with fashion, you always have to **change what you look like** to stay trendy.

Websites are no longer enough. As good as your spa's site might be, you still have to get people to it. The 20-something user isn't likely to Google "spa austin texas" and find

your spa among the 1,460,000 results. But on MySpace, Facebook or YouTube, she might type in "microdermabrasion" and find your posted video of one of your treatments, a before-

and-after photo gallery, or a how-to on skincare, and you'll have piqued her interest. Creating an application that gives education to the community isn't considered self-promotion; it's providing a service by sharing your expertise. "Have your content sit in major portals where people are already congregated, and then add value to their lives," Johnson instructs. (Incidentally, the 2006 ISPA study found that "not knowing what to expect" was the largest concern among young people regarding a spa visit.)

Using cyberspace as media may still be new for some spas, but it's a natural progression, says Trent. "What has kept spas vibrant in the news is our ability to be the news," she reminds. "We've kept a dialogue with the media and now we have to keep communicating through these new channels. Just as with fashion, you always have to change what you look like to stay trendy." A podcast series offering tips on stress control? You bet, but make sure it's not boring. "Use humor and great design and music and video. Keep it short and easy to email," says Johnson.

When you finally get that 20-something to your menu, make sure you present her with something that she perceives will improve her life. "It's imperative to have a wide array of products and treatments," says Trent. "Be highly customized and appear so. Rename things age appropriately. It may be an antiaging facial but don't call it that. It's about framing the benefits into the concerns of your customer. It's the same as it is for older customers: spa is lifestyle."

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