

The Art of Communication and Networking for the “Under-Thirty” Generation: The Impact Felt and Heard Around the World

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“We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing”

—R. D. Laing (*Scottish Psychologist, 1927-1989*)

For most working adults over age 45, this quote seems to be increasingly true with little hope of reversal. The world has changed and along with it, ways of communicating, staying connected and interacting with friends, colleagues and work associates. The recent spring and summer 2011 political uprisings in the Middle East will probably go down in history as the “Twitter Revolution.” In that time and place, social media proved to be an immediate and free mass communication tool that allowed protesters to quickly plan gatherings of large numbers of people and mobilize them for a cause. Because every atrocity in the world can be documented and instantly posted by cameras on cell phones, awareness of issues is immediate.

Today, one can receive Twitter messages from the President of the United States; receive news updates via your mobile device from national news sources and video conference with colleagues in the outback of China in seconds. Today, it is hard to imagine human abuses going unnoticed on the world stage.

For the Millennial Generation (born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s), advanced technology, rapid communication, social networking and the use of social networking sites have become common yet crucial parts of everyday life. Experts have defined social networking as:

“The practice of expanding the number of one’s business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals. While social networking has gone on almost as long as societies themselves have existed, the unparalleled potential of the Internet to promote such connections is only now being fully recognized and exploited, through web-based groups established for that purpose”.

Visiting social networking sites multiple times a day has become routine for the majority of those under 30

around the world. Boyd in "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship" defined social networking sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to: (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."

Technology & Social Networking Habits of Teenagers

The use of web-based communications has increased dramatically over the past ten years among all age groups but especially among those under 30. The following statistics have been cited about teens and social networking sites:

- 51% check their sites more than once a day.
- 22% check their sites more than 10 times a day.
- 39% have posted something they later regretted.
- 37% have used the sites to make fun of other students.
- 26% have pretended to be someone else online.
- 24% have hacked into someone else's social networking account.
- 13% have posted nude or seminude pictures or videos of themselves or others online.
- 19% say they have been "cyber bullied"
- The typical American teen sends 80 text messages a day or 2,272 a month.

But teenagers are not the only ones heavily using technology and social networking as communication tools. With advances in technology, common practice and expectations have changed for all generations.

Technology/Social Networking Habits of Young Adults and Older Generations

People of all age groups are embracing technology and it is impacting communication at a growing rate. But, as seen in Table 1 below, the younger generation utilizes technology at a much higher rate.

Table 1: Generational Difference and Communication

	MILLENNIALS	GENERATION X	BABY BOOMERS	VETERANS/SILENT
Believe technology makes life easier	74%	69%	60%	50%
Believe technology makes people closer	54%	52%	48%	44%
Use internet or send/receive emails	90%	87%	79%	40%
Connect to the internet wirelessly	62%	48%	35%	11%
Use social networking websites	75%	50%	30%	6%
Use cell phone to text	88%	77%	51%	9%
Texted while driving	64%	46%	21%	1%
Sleep with their cell phones near by	83%	68%	50%	20%
Have cell phone and no land line	41%	24%	13%	5%

Both Gen X and the Millennials (but especially the Millennials) widely use electronic communication, are connected everywhere they go and believe in the positive benefits of technology. Communicating, marketing, purchasing and staying connected have taken on new meaning over the past ten years worldwide. Businesses and industries who have not embraced social media are headed for serious losses as the near 80 million Millennials reach adulthood and have different beliefs and practices than previous generations. Social networking and social media are not the wave of the future; they are here now and dramatically impacting the corporate bottom line. Some global statistics about this generation regarding their social networking and communication habits are as follows:

- By July 2011, the three most popular brands online were Facebook (750 million users), YouTube (2 billion views per day) and Wikipedia (14,877,771 registered users of 3,677,442 articles and 24,396,136 pages)
 - » There are more than 750 million active users of Facebook (50% log on daily, 33% with mobile devices) and the average user has 130 friends
 - » 70% of users are outside the US (70 translations available)
 - » People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook and create an average of 90 pieces of content per month
 - » There are over 900 million objects that people interact with on Facebook (pages, groups, events, etc.)
 - » The average user is connected with 80 community pages, groups and events
 - » An average of 10,000 new websites integrate with Facebook every day (2.5 million so far)
- The world spends 110 billion minutes per month on social-media and blog sites. This equates to 22% of all the time online or 1 in every 4 ½ minutes
- These sites were visited by 75% of the global consumers who go online with the average visitor spending almost 6 hours a month
- Fewer US young adults are blogging and using Twitter than a few years ago but Twitter is catching on outside the US
- 57% of YouTube videos are embedded by 20-35 year olds
- The mobile phone is the best platform for social networking (mobile web)
- The Millennials are the most difficult generation to market to or influence through traditional means
- Millennials don't believe everything they read or hear (their parents taught them that), they record TV and fast-forward through commercials, they believe in recommendations from friends and trusted adults and they look for websites where consumers rate products and services (not the company itself)

While Americans under 30 represent approximately 33% of the U.S. population, they have a huge potential for impacting our society and the future. With the over-reliance on technology, sociologist and educators are concerned about relationship-building, socialization skills, and the basic skills (reading, writing and speaking) of young people. We have observed over the past decade that writing letters as a means of communication is a lost art; in fact, handwriting of any sort is no longer a daily occurrence. But with the typical teen sending 2,272 text messages a month (and writing with their thumbs), one has to wonder if speaking is soon to follow.

Awareness is Critical

The reality for this generation is they are better connected to friends, family and colleagues than any other generation in history. They read and write constantly (albeit abbreviated text messages and web pages). They have large contact lists in their cell phones which they upload each time they purchase a new phone. They stay in touch on a regular basis with old friends and remote family members, but technology has impacted them. Some things that are different and should be noted about this generation, their attitudes and skills, are as follows:

1. They have forgotten how to write in cursive. They learned it in grade school and no one has forced them to use it since. Everything they read and write is printed and typed.
2. Family of origin matters. Children who grow up in families with educated parents and in middle class or above families have been exposed to more non-entertainment-based technology. They are more likely to be able to use technology that “does work for them” than lower income children from families where neither parent has a college degree. The digital divide is based on class (income and education) not race.
3. Compared to other generations, staying connected and social networking is critical for them. They expect to check in with friends and colleagues, even at work. One study found that 24% of young adults use social media at work and on company time.
4. They consider email outdated and don’t check it regularly. Usage of email is down 18% in young adults 25-34. Other forms of communication are of greater interest to them.
5. They spend the majority of their time writing in the abbreviated and non-punctuated language used in text messaging and often forget NOT to use it in more formal communications.
6. They need email etiquette when they first enter the workforce. They over-disclose what would be considered private by most in adult society. There is no such thing as privacy in today’s electronic world. Language, punctuation and professional tone are all issues. Emailreplies.com posts 32 rules for email etiquette.
7. They understand technology and seem to have a blueprint in their head for how things work (if you can’t program your cell phone, ask a 12-year-old.)
8. They understand the communication style and expectations of today’s young people and can become true assets for any company willing to listen and allow them to use their skills.

The Millennial generation is still young and has not had time to make its mark on the world. But one thing is clear – technological and other changes in society have led to changes in attitudes, behaviors and skills of young people. While some feel they lack basic skills that previous generations have taken for granted, they are talented and have advanced skills in other areas.

Conclusion

Social networking and changes in means of communication have had an impact on virtually every aspect of life around the globe. One’s social, professional and family lives have been altered. The world has become a much smaller place and people, no matter how remotely located, are better connected than ever before. While this sounds daunting to many in the “over 40” segment of our society, it has become a way of life for young people. Advances in technology facilitate greater and more rapid awareness of the world’s problems, facilitate communication and will move us forward to an even better connected world where problems will find solutions.