

How to attract the next generation

Companies need to adjust their recruitment and retention practices to take into account the culture and needs of the new Millennial generation

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As the baby boomers head towards retirement, the chemical distribution industry needs to look to the Millennial generation, or Generation Y, to fill the gap.

Cornelius Group's chairman Neville Prior and non-executive director Jo Stephenson believe that the industry has been relatively successful in attracting Millennials due to its efforts with national education systems, solid training plans, recognised career paths and the industry's intrinsically international nature.

They point out, however, that competition with high-tech industries is creating challenges and argue that the sector needs to better understand Millennial employees' requirements to prevent retention becoming an issue over the longer term.

"Unlike Generation X, Millennials consider workplace satisfaction more important than monetary compensation," says Stephenson.

"The needs and desires of our Millennial employees are also more deeply ingrained – the need for flexibility, work/life balance, high tech working practices, networking and social needs are all to the fore. Our industry needs to further adapt and evolve its business culture to meet these needs."

BROADER CHOICES TODAY

Stephenson adds that those entering the job market 10 years ago were acutely aware of the economic slowdown and volatility and were therefore perhaps more grateful to enter a more traditional industry. "Today, choices are far broader and more sophisticated – despite what the media might indicate."

So how do you attract a Millennial to the industry? Prior argues that this all begins and ends with engaging with the education systems around the world and backing this up with good digital communications.

"Millennials do not wake up to the industry once they are searching for a job but are far more



Millennials are much more connected and IT savvy than the Baby Boomers

aware of the impact of industries on society through their engagement with digital channels early on in their lifetime. They've seen the stories – positive and negative – and decided whether that industry is ethically, morally and socially right for them, well before leaving the education system."

Prior points out that a large focus of the chemical industry has been on ensuring the growth in numbers of STEM graduates. He believes that many companies do an excellent job of working with their local community schools and colleges to educate students on the chemical industry's role, opportunities and challenges. Many Fecc member companies support a range of STEM supportive activities including in-house local community campaigns and local government initiatives.

Stephenson believes, however, that what is missing is true engagement across the digital

media channels to support that work, where the future millennial employee is probably watching and learning. "Negative and often incorrect stories about use of chemicals and additives in foods, packaging and water for example, often hit their App of choice," says Stephenson.

"We need to be telling the positive impacts our industry makes on our social, economic and environmental living standards to counteract this perception, as well as of course tackle the misinformation that arises."

Stephenson adds that Fecc works with media partners, social media other relevant associations and institutions to highlight positive aspects of the industry, the solutions it brings to the world and the opportunity for good, meaningful long-term careers. It has also been considering how it might work with members to attract, retain and mentor young people in the industry and acknowledge the contributions that young

GLOBAL BENEFITS SAYS IMCD'S SCHNEIDER

"For companies like us, Millennials are the people we need," says Frank Schneider, a member of the IMCD executive committee and member of the Fecc board. He believes that Millennials can be the foundation and the carriers of the globalisation process.

"Millennials for me are 'globals'; they have no boundaries and they are more fearless. They want to travel and are very open-minded in terms of culture and globalisation."

As IMCD, along with other distribution companies, look towards taking companies global, Schneider believes that the mobile and flexible Millennial generation has the skills to spread the company culture.

"You could buy a company and put your brand on it, but that won't work because you won't have the synergy if you don't inject the same company spirit. You need someone to carry your culture and your spirit around the globe. Millennials can help a company to go everywhere, because they are prepared to go anywhere."

people in the industry bring, she adds.

In terms of recruitment, Stephenson thinks that at a simple level, the industry needs to employ the communication channels that Millennials engage with.

"Social media is how Millennials communicate today. Period. So, it makes sense that social media is utilised as a recruitment platform." She warns, however, that a mistake that many businesses make is taking a scattergun approach using different social media platforms, which can lead to disparate, conflicting information.

"Millennials can spot novice communicators a mile off. That's why the most important thing to



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JO STEPHENSON

Non-executive director, Cornelius Group

consider is how best to use social media as a range of distribution tools for a sound content marketing strategy. Making yourself visible on social media without a clear message can be dangerous, due to the need to be highly reactive dependent on the communication need."

Stephenson suggests that companies should start by defining a clear message and then follow this up by producing engaging and interesting content. Then, and only then, should they rework the content to suit each platform, whether that's Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn or YouTube.

So once you have employed a Millennial, how do you coach and keep them? Prior says that according to recent studies, such as in the *Harvard Business Review*, it is clear that the mentoring and coaching needs of Millennials is not radically different from previous generations – they want to get ahead, receive recognition and feedback on a regular basis and develop both technically and personally. Where the real difference comes is in the flexible, more balanced and blended approach they take to learning, says Prior.

Digital tools for e-learning certainly play a role, says Prior, given that a significant amount of a Millennial's informal learning comes from this source. Strong Millennial coaches will likely be using a wide variety of digital tools such as blogs, forums and chat rooms as references to support their employees' development, he adds. Technology also naturally suits a Millennial work style, says Prior. "E-learning, mobile, online, digital – they are comfortable with all modes of technology and like to see this being used."

MORE FLEXIBLE CAREERS

Millennials still look to their leaders to drive their experience according to Stephenson. However, she adds that they are more open to having a number of jobs and roles rather than expecting one career with one organisation and are, as a result, perhaps more flexible and open to change than previous generations in terms of developing their careers.

Stephenson says that most modern companies in the chemical industry today have comprehensive talent management programmes in place because of the challenges of attraction and retention. She adds however, that these programmes should be diverse and flexible enough to satisfy any employee, whatever their needs and desires.

"It's not all about pay. It's about work conditions, social and ethical standards and development. They are not necessarily as monetarily motivated as previous generations but are seeking more flexible attitudes and working environments, more work/life balance. They are comfortable with disruption and change; however, they seek social, moral and ethical balances, and if the organisation they work for does not reflect these values, the retention issue can quickly emerge."

Female Millennials no longer perceive the gender disadvantages that plagued the baby-boomer and Generation X employee. However, the key to attracting and retaining females in

any organisation is making the industry attractive to them in the first place, says Stephenson.

She argues that the industry needs to demonstrate its diverse and balanced approach, which it has done a lot better at in recent years, and then provide the role models to show the way. This latter requirement is often supported with industry networking and training initiatives for example WIN (Women's Innovation Network), Women in STEM, POWERful Women, etc.

"With respect to retention, the need to break for families will al-



"Coaching the Millennials has to be more innovative and flexible... and reflects more on the social aspects of development than formal and technical ones"

NEVILLE PRIOR

Chairman, Cornelius Group

ways exist and the industry, in the main, has done a lot of work in recent years to ensure its talented employees return if at all possible. Flexible and part time working have gone a long way to improve this situation," says Stephenson.

Company culture is also extremely important to Millennials, says Prior, as they do not welcome the formal "shirt and tie" and "Mr Smith" environment. "They are contemporary, relaxed and seeking balance. Work hard/play hard-type attitudes prevail. However, do not mistake this for lack of ambition or drive."

The health and well-being of employees has come to the fore in recent years as the mental and physical health of employees has become more widely recognised as a contributor to business success. Prior says, "personal growth is reflected in topics such as emotional intelligence, work/life balance, understanding your motivators and drivers, interpersonal skills and psychological profiling, which are all key parts of a well-designed leadership and development programme today."

Stephenson and Prior don't believe there can be a one-solution fits all approach to employing Millennials, given that their needs can be diverse. Clearly, says Stephenson, "the ability to take leave for personal development, flexible working arrangements, learning and development programmes (formal and e-based), enabling connection of the Millennial through digital tools (blogging, networking, hang-outs, etc) will all help the Millennial to feel connected, in the right industry for them and engaged." ■